



"All for One and One for All" the 2014 painting by Regina Holliday depicts the concept of the health care team.

PHOTO COURTESY OF REGINA HOLLIDAY

An illustrated outcry

Patients' stories reach a wider, influential audience painted on the backs of business suits

BY SUE ZALOKAR
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Regina Holliday wears many hats. She is an activist, artist, speaker and author. She uses the tools of technology and social media to better understand the patient condition and the landscape of medicine.

But nothing had prepared her for the experience of navigating the nation's health care system. In 2009, Holliday's husband, Fred Holliday, died from long-term undiagnosed kidney cancer. It was a catastrophic diagnosis that opened her eyes to the entrenched bureaucracy of our health care system.

Holliday realized pretty quickly that there was a massive lack of communication in the system, and many times the patient and family caregivers really weren't part of the conversation. She started Regina Holliday's Medical Advocacy blog and helped advance the burgeoning "e-patient" movement.

She put her artistic talents to work as well. She started the campaign "The Walking Gallery" in which people wear paintings of people's health stories, and those of their family members, on the backs of their business suits. They can be seen at medical conferences throughout the world as a way for providers to present their "patient self first then a provider second," Holliday says.

Today, Holliday has become a leading patient advocate and artist-activist who travels the country speaking to groups about the importance of a transparent health care system in which patients have



Regina Holliday will be the keynote speaker at the We Can Do Better Conference, April 24, at the Ambridge Event Center in Northeast Portland.

timely access to their medical histories. In doing so, she has not only heightened awareness, but also, likely, saved lives.

Regina Holliday will speak at the 2014 We Can Do Better health care conference in Portland April 23-24.

S.Z.: How did The Walking Gallery get started?

R.H.: I met a friend on Twitter whose name is Jen McCabe. She worked within the whole world of the quantified self-movement where people are tracking their own data. She direct messaged me on Twitter that she had an idea. She was going to some conferences that were hard to get into if you were a patient — the American Medical Association, for instance. She asked if she could send me some jackets that she was planning to wear at the conference, and if so, would I paint on the back of them? I thought it was great idea.

I painted my story — mine and my husband's experience — on her back in three different ways. Somebody else saw it

and liked it, so I painted one for them and then another request came in. These first paintings were all from my experience and my worldview. We called them art jackets. That was back in early 2011.

In April 2011, Kaiser Permanente opened The Center for Total Health in Washington D.C. It is an educational center. The idea is that it is an open use space that anybody can reserve that is about total health of citizens. I was in there and I loved the space. I had a friend who was affiliated with Kaiser and I said, "Wow! We should do a gallery show here." And my friend laughed because one entire wall of this room is a smart wall. I explained that the paintings won't be on the walls, the paintings will be on the people's backs who are in the room. They will be the docents of their own lives and stories.

I had one month to find other artists besides myself to paint 56 jackets for 56 people. We did it! And we called it The Walking Gallery. The idea was that they would walk around the center and they would tell about their lives. But it didn't stop there. We ask that in trade for the jacket you walk at a public event or health conferences two or three times per year. You will go to conferences where you might be the only one wearing a painted jacket. But by telling your story, you will get other people to tell their stories as well.

S.Z.: That sounds amazing.

R.H.: It was. We have walkers all over the

world. We have folks in France, Canada, Australia, Senegal, The Netherlands, as well as all over the United States. And they are going to conferences every week, telling their story and spreading the word. It has been a massively powerful movement. At this point there are, besides myself, 24 other artists — five of whom are children — who are artist members of The Walking Gallery.

S.Z.: How many jackets are in the gallery?

R.H.: We have 282 "walkers" walking around the world.

S.Z.: How does someone commission a Walking Gallery jacket painting?

R.H.: I always tell people it's not a commission, it's a co-mission. (Laughs) If you wanted to be part of The Walking Gallery you basically say, "I want to tell my story on my back. I want to wear my story two or three times per year." The jackets have to be a business suit jacket. That was because I noticed that at conferences, the important people wear business suits. It's sort of the uniform of a conference. You aren't really taken that seriously if you aren't wearing the uniform.

S.Z.: And what is the cost?

R.H.: There is no monetary charge, though if people want to donate toward

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