


My Life, My Story: How Patient Stories Can Strengthen Clinical Care

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“As long as I’ve been doing things with the VA nobody has ever asked me anything about my life. There was never anybody to tell because nobody wanted to listen. This is the first time.” – Veteran

VistA CPRS in use by: Ringler, Thor S (vista.madison.med.va.gov)

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My Story Oct 05, 2018

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My best friend growing up was William Baldwin. He was a farmer's son. He used to have pitchfork fights in the haymound with other kids. They would throw pitchforks at each other to see how close they could get to the other guy. Until they got caught. His parents weren't too happy about that. Bill and I went to school together in a small town in Michigan - all through grade school and high school. We graduated in 1963.

Bill worked at an animal hospital but got another job. He asked me if I wanted his old job so I went out and talked to the veterinarian and started working there as an assistant. Bill and I both got drafted in 1965. We were the first two to get drafted from our town. They didn't have the buddy program at that time but we went through basic training together in the same company in Fort Knox, Kentucky. After graduating from boot camp we flew home together and then flew back together to AIT training at Fort Rucker, Alabama. My MOS was Helicopter Maintenance and I was a Crew Chief. Bill had the same MOS.

Print Close

The Stories

- 1,000 words
- First-person narrative.
- Told in the veteran's voice.
- Reviewed and approved by veteran.
- Prominent location in EHR.

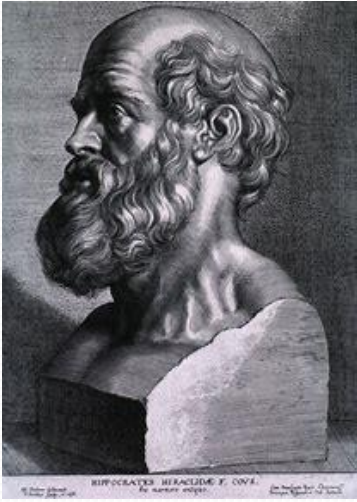
The Process

- Staff, volunteers or student learners interview veterans and ask them what they would like their care team to know about them.
- Interviewers write up a short story and review it with the veteran.
- Veterans get printed copies of the approved story to share with family and/or friends.
- The story is added to the EHR as a “My Story” note.

Project History

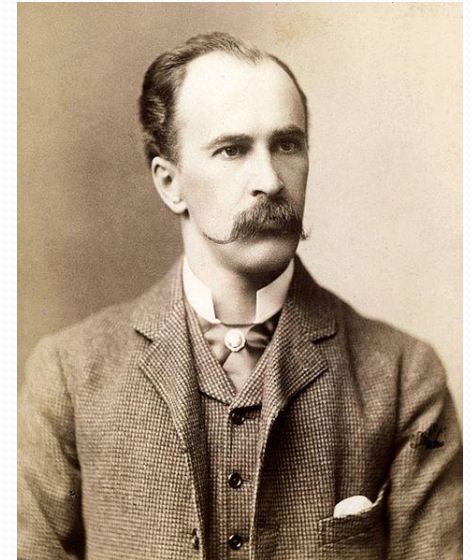
- 2013/2014 – Pilot program launches at Madison VA. First community volunteers trained.
- 2015/2016 – Project expands to 6 VA pilot sites. Toolkit and training video released. 1,000th veteran story added to EHR. First training workshop.
- 2017/2018 – Project selected for national implementation across VA. My Life, My Story Implemented at 25 VA medical centers.
- 2019 – My Life, My Story Implemented at 50 VA medical centers

Why Do Stories Matter?



It's far more important to know what person the disease has than what disease the person has. – Hippocrates 400 BCE

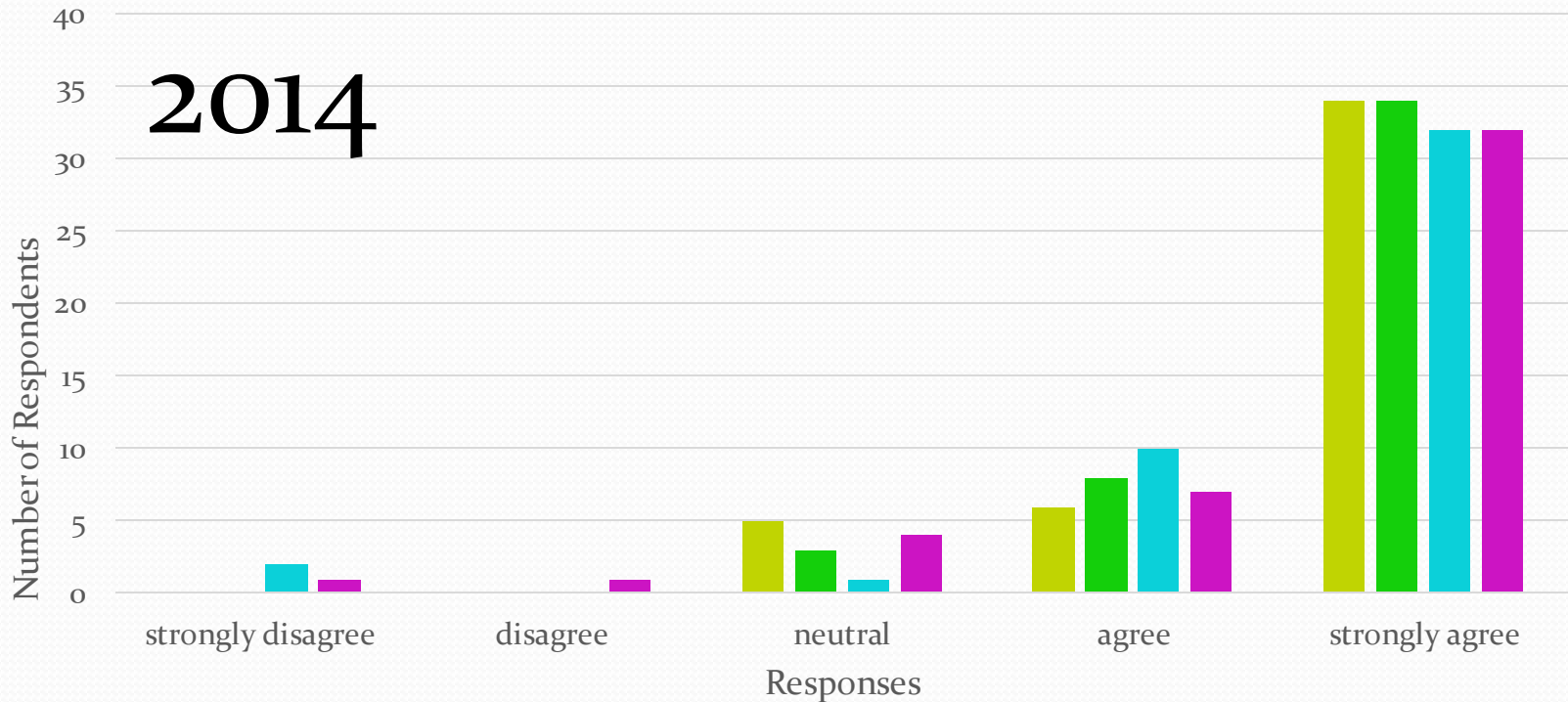
The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease. – Sir William Osler 1848-1919



Stories Change the Story

- “The interview was enjoyable. I said things that I had never told anyone. I am now saying those things to my friends and family. It feels good.” – Veteran
- Going through this process of writing my life story has helped relieve some of the pain (physical and emotional) but more importantly just when I thought I hadn’t made an impact on anyone’s life, after sharing my story with family/friends, I realize that I did. – Veteran
- “Thank you very much. This was very worthwhile and gave me the opening to share thoughts and memories that were buried for 40+ years.” – Veteran

Stories Change the Story



- I liked the visit from the interviewer today
- I felt this visit gave me a chance to describe myself to my treatment team
- I felt that my story was a helpful part of my care
- The Madison Veterans Hospital should continue this program

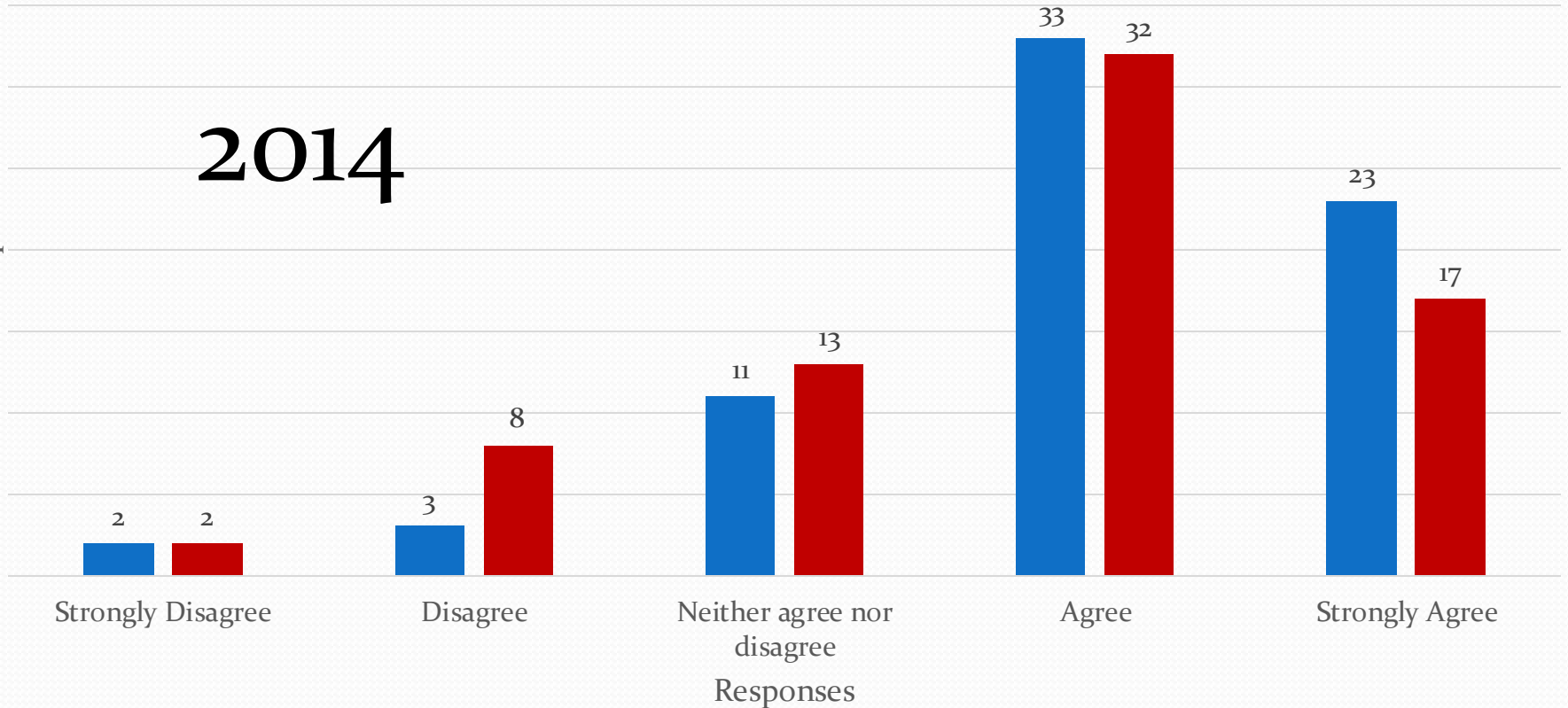
Stories Change the Story

After we read the “My Story”, he became a hero in our eyes. Turns out he was in the 82nd airborne division as a machine gunner. He joined the Army boxing team and spent a year as a novice boxer, winning a tournament and training for the 1976 Olympics. He was a cook in Afghanistan and with only 11 helpers, he cooked for 11,000 soldiers! He still cooks for his wife. He now helps other Veterans by taking care of their spiritual needs as a pastor.

Stories Change the Culture

2014

Number of Respondents



■ Reading "My Story" notes is a good use of my clinical time.

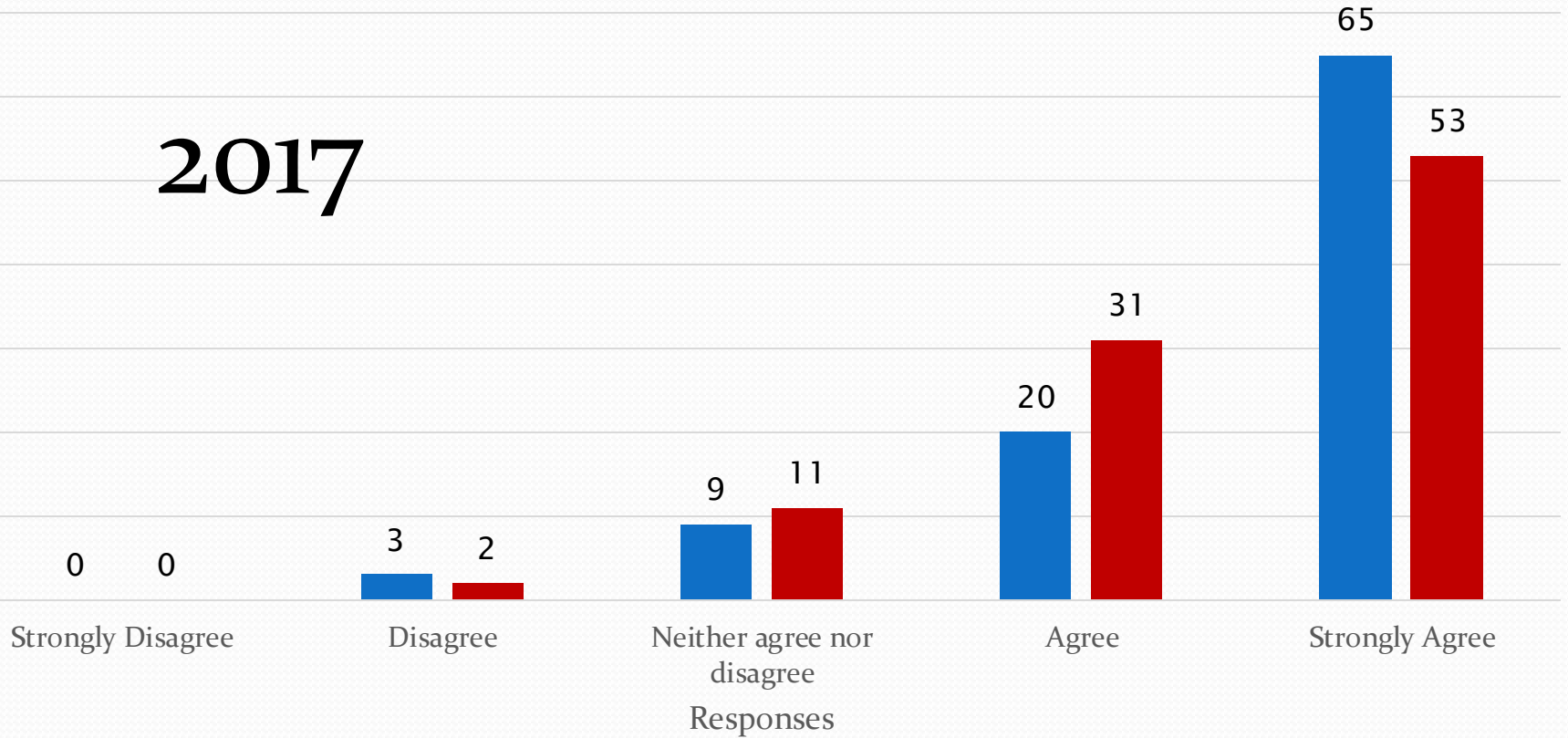
■ Reading "My Story" notes helps me provide better treatment/care.

From a January 2014 survey of Madison VA providers.

Stories Change the Culture

2017

Number of Respondents



- Reading "My Story" notes is a good use of my clinical time.
- Reading "My Story" notes helps me provide better treatment/care.

From an October 2017 survey of Madison VA providers.



My Life, My Story



References

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- Ringler, T., Ahearn, E. P., Wise, M., Lee, E. R., & Krahn, D. (2015). Using life stories to connect veterans and providers. *Federal Practitioner*, 32(6), 8–14.
- Sable-Smith, B. (2019, June 8) [Storytelling Helps Hospital Staff Discover The Person Within The Patient](https://www.npr.org/). Retrieved from: <https://www.npr.org/>

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