

BEYOND THE CLINIC: ARTISTIC PRACTICE AS A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE MODEL FOR PHYSICIANS

ALÉM DA CLÍNICA: A PRÁTICA ARTÍSTICA COMO MODELO DE ESTILO DE VIDA SUSTENTÁVEL PARA MÉDICOS

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study is to examine how artistic practice—particularly music, visual arts, and poetry—can serve as a sustainable lifestyle model for physicians, supporting well-being, communication, and burnout prevention in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being). **Theoretical Framework:** The study draws on interdisciplinary literature connecting medicine, psychology, and the arts. Historical examples of physician-artists, together with contemporary research on music and medicine, provide the conceptual basis for understanding how artistic engagement enhances empathy, perceptual skills, and emotional regulation. **Method:** A narrative–conceptual methodology was adopted, combining a selective review of scholarly literature with reflective insights derived from professional experience in clinical radiology and long-term artistic training. This approach allows for an integrated interpretation of how artistic practice contributes to sustainable professional development. **Results and Discussion:** Findings indicate that artistic activities foster non-verbal communication, teamwork, cognitive flexibility, and stress management. Music and ensemble performance strengthen collaborative skills, while visual and narrative arts enhance observation and perspective-taking. These competencies are particularly relevant in high-intensity medical environments, including radiology. **Research Implications:** The study highlights the potential of integrating artistic practice into medical education and institutional culture, suggesting dual-career models and interdisciplinary collaborations as strategies to promote physician well-being and professional resilience. **Originality/Value:** This work contributes to the literature by framing artistic practice as a sustainable lifestyle model for physicians and by illustrating how dual engagement in medicine

Resumo

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é examinar como a prática artística — particularmente a música, as artes visuais e a poesia — pode servir como um modelo de estilo de vida sustentável para médicos, promovendo bem-estar, comunicação e prevenção da síndrome de burnout, em consonância com o Objetivo de Desenvolvimento Sustentável 3 (ODS 3: Saúde e Bem-Estar). **Referencial Teórico:** O estudo baseia-se em literatura interdisciplinar que conecta medicina, psicologia e artes. Exemplos históricos de médicos-artistas, juntamente com pesquisas contemporâneas sobre música e medicina, fornecem a base conceitual para a compreensão de como o envolvimento artístico aprimora a empatia, as habilidades perceptivas e a regulação emocional. **Método:** Adotou-se uma metodologia narrativa-conceitual, combinando uma revisão seletiva da literatura acadêmica com reflexões derivadas da experiência profissional em radiologia clínica e de um longo período de formação artística. Essa abordagem permite uma interpretação integrada de como a prática artística contribui para o desenvolvimento profissional sustentável. **Resultados e Discussão:** Os resultados indicam que as atividades artísticas promovem a comunicação não verbal, o trabalho em equipe, a flexibilidade cognitiva e o gerenciamento do estresse. A música e a performance em conjunto fortalecem as habilidades de colaboração, enquanto as artes visuais e narrativas aprimoram a observação e a capacidade de adotar diferentes perspectivas. Essas competências são particularmente relevantes em ambientes médicos de alta intensidade, incluindo a radiologia. **Implicações para a pesquisa:** O estudo destaca o potencial da integração da prática artística na educação médica e na cultura institucional, sugerindo modelos de dupla carreira e colaborações interdisciplinares como estratégias para



and the arts can enrich clinical performance, educational innovation, and civic engagement.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal 3. Physician-Artists. Dual Career. Music and Medicine. Burnout Prevention. Sustainable Lifestyle.

promover o bem-estar e a resiliência profissional dos médicos. Originalidade/Valor: Este trabalho contribui para a literatura ao enquadrar a prática artística como um modelo de estilo de vida sustentável para médicos e ao ilustrar como o envolvimento simultâneo na medicina e nas artes pode enriquecer o desempenho clínico, a inovação educacional e o engajamento cívico.

Palavras-chave: *Objetivo de Desenvolvimento Sustentável 3. Médico-Artistas. Dupla Carreira. Música e Medicina. Prevenção da Síndrome de Burnout. Estilo de Vida Sustentável.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Physicians increasingly engage in activities that extend beyond clinical practice, integrating artistic experiences into their professional and personal lives. This tendency reflects a broader understanding of well-being that aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being), which emphasizes the importance of mental health, stress reduction, and sustainable professional lifestyles. Artistic practice—whether musical, visual, literary, or performative—supports cognitive flexibility, emotional balance, and relational competence, offering physicians additional tools to navigate the complexity of contemporary healthcare environments.

The relationship between medicine and the arts has deep historical roots. From the symbolic figure of Apollo, embodying both healing and artistic harmony, to the many physician-artists documented in the literature, artistic engagement has long been recognized as a complementary dimension of medical identity. Musical practice, in particular, illustrates how scientific precision and aesthetic awareness can coexist, fostering concentration, disciplined listening, and teamwork. Similar benefits emerge from visual arts, poetry, and narrative practices, which enhance observational acuity, empathy, and perspective-taking—skills essential for patient-centered care.

In recent years, growing attention has been devoted to the role of artistic practice in preventing burnout, improving communication, and supporting sustainable career development among healthcare professionals. Evidence suggests that integrating artistic activities into medical education may strengthen resilience and promote healthier

work-life integration. This article explores how artistic practice can serve as a sustainable lifestyle model for physicians, drawing on interdisciplinary literature and professional experience, and proposes strategies to support dual-career pathways within academic and healthcare institutions.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between medicine and the arts has deep historical and cultural roots. In classical tradition, the figure of Apollo symbolized the unity of healing and artistic harmony, suggesting that scientific reasoning and aesthetic sensibility are not opposing forces but complementary dimensions of human knowledge. This idea is reflected in the long lineage of physician-artists whose careers demonstrate how artistic engagement can coexist with, and even enhance, clinical practice. Among the most frequently cited examples are Theodor Billroth, surgeon and accomplished musician; Hermann von Helmholtz, physiologist and author of *On the Sensations of Tone*; Albert Schweitzer, physician, theologian, and organist; Alexander Borodin, chemist and composer; and Barton, surgeon and painter [1–6]. Their trajectories illustrate how artistic discipline supports analytical precision, perceptual acuity, and the management of performance-related stress.

Contemporary literature reinforces this historical perspective by highlighting the transferable competencies developed through artistic practice. Musical training, in particular, has been associated with enhanced non-verbal communication, working memory, emotional regulation, and collaborative skills—competencies that are essential in complex clinical environments [7–11]. Studies using chamber music as an educational tool have shown that ensemble performance fosters active listening, coordination, and adaptive teamwork, offering a model for improving communication among medical students. Similarly, visual arts and narrative practices contribute to the development of observational accuracy, empathy, and perspective-taking, all of which are central to patient-centered care.

These findings align with a broader body of research emphasizing the role of the arts in promoting well-being and preventing burnout among healthcare professionals. The increasing cognitive and emotional demands of medical work underscore the need for

sustainable strategies that support mental health and professional longevity. Artistic engagement provides a structured space for reflection, emotional processing, and stress reduction, contributing directly to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being), which includes the promotion of mental health and the reduction of work-related stress.

Finally, the concept of the “dual career,” widely recognized in the context of student-athletes, is gaining relevance in medical education as a framework for supporting individuals who pursue both scientific and artistic development. Academic institutions, conservatories, and cultural organizations can play a pivotal role in facilitating these pathways by offering flexible programs, interdisciplinary collaborations, and formal recognition of the competencies acquired through artistic practice. Such an approach not only enriches the humanistic dimension of medical training but also contributes to the formation of more resilient, creative, and well-rounded professionals.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a narrative–conceptual methodology, integrating a selective review of interdisciplinary literature with professional observations derived from clinical practice and long-term engagement in artistic activities. This approach is appropriate for exploring complex phenomena—such as the relationship between artistic practice, physician well-being, and sustainable professional lifestyles—that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone.

The literature review focused on publications addressing the intersection of medicine, music, visual arts, psychology, and medical education. Sources included historical accounts of physician-artists, contemporary studies on music and medicine, research on burnout and resilience among healthcare professionals, and contributions examining the role of the arts in communication, empathy, and emotional regulation. The selection prioritized peer-reviewed articles, conceptual analyses, and educational reports relevant to the development of transferable skills in clinical settings.

In parallel, the study incorporates reflective insights grounded in professional experience within radiology and artistic training. These reflections are not presented as autobiographical narratives but as informed perspectives that contribute to understanding

how artistic practice may support diagnostic focus, emotional balance, and teamwork in high-intensity medical environments. This dual lens—scholarly and experiential—allows for a nuanced interpretation of how artistic engagement can function as a sustainable lifestyle model for physicians.

The narrative–conceptual design aligns with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which emphasizes mental health, well-being, and the prevention of work-related stress. By synthesizing evidence across disciplines and integrating experiential knowledge, the methodology aims to illuminate pathways through which artistic practice can contribute to healthier, more resilient medical careers.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The synthesis of historical evidence, contemporary literature, and professional observations highlights several domains in which artistic practice contributes to sustainable professional lifestyles for physicians. These domains include communication, emotional regulation, teamwork, cognitive flexibility, and burnout prevention—competencies directly aligned with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being).

4.1 Communication and Non-verbal competence

Musical training, particularly in ensemble and chamber music settings, strengthens non-verbal communication through coordinated gestures, shared timing, and anticipatory listening. Studies using chamber music as an educational tool for medical students demonstrate that ensemble performance fosters active listening, situational awareness, and the ability to interpret subtle cues within a group [11]. These skills translate effectively to clinical environments, where physicians must navigate complex interactions with patients, colleagues, and multidisciplinary teams. Visual arts and narrative practices similarly enhance observational acuity and interpretive sensitivity, supporting more nuanced patient assessments.

4.2 Emotional regulation and stress management

Artistic engagement provides structured opportunities for emotional expression and regulation. Music, in particular, has been associated with reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced resilience among healthcare professionals [12,13]. The discipline required in musical performance—managing anxiety, maintaining focus under pressure, and recovering from errors—mirrors the emotional demands of clinical practice. Evidence suggests that these competencies may help mitigate burnout, a pervasive issue in medicine and a central concern of SDG 3. Visual and literary arts also offer reflective spaces that support emotional processing and self-awareness, contributing to healthier coping strategies.

4.3 Teamwork and collaborative practice

Team-based artistic activities, such as chamber music or ensemble performance, provide a model for collaborative clinical work. Musicians must coordinate roles, negotiate interpretive decisions, and maintain collective coherence—processes analogous to interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare. These parallels have inspired educational initiatives that use artistic frameworks to teach teamwork, adaptability, and shared leadership. Such competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for effective clinical practice, particularly in high-intensity environments.

4.4 Cognitive flexibility and diagnostic attention

Artistic practice enhances cognitive flexibility by engaging perceptual, analytical, and creative processes simultaneously. Musicians develop refined pattern-recognition abilities, attention to detail, and disciplined listening—skills that support diagnostic reasoning and clinical decision-making. Visual artists cultivate sensitivity to form, contrast, and spatial relationships, which may contribute to improved observational accuracy. These cognitive benefits align with the growing emphasis on integrative thinking in medical education.

4.5 Application to radiology: a case example

Radiology provides a particularly illustrative example of how artistic practice can support professional performance. The specialty requires sustained visual attention, rapid pattern recognition, and the ability to manage cognitive load during high-stakes tasks. Evidence suggests that musical training may enhance these competencies by strengthening auditory-visual integration, concentration, and emotional regulation [10]. Professional observations indicate that artistic engagement can support diagnostic focus during demanding activities such as breast MRI interpretation or interventional procedures.

The radiology community has already demonstrated interest in the intersection of art and medicine. At the 2012 European Congress of Radiology (ECR), a group of radiologists who are also musicians performed together, highlighting the cultural and professional value of dual identities. Building on this momentum, several strategies could support radiologists who pursue artistic practice: flexible scheduling, mentorship networks, recognition of transferable skills, and collaborations between radiology departments and music or art institutions. The creation of a registry of radiologist-musicians could further promote research, community building, and educational innovation.

4.6 Implications for medical education and institutional policy

The evidence presented suggests that integrating artistic practice into medical training may strengthen competencies essential for sustainable professional development. Institutions could adopt dual-career models similar to those used for student-athletes, offering flexible pathways that allow medical students and physicians to cultivate artistic skills alongside clinical training. Such initiatives would not only support individual well-being but also enrich the cultural and educational environment of medical schools and healthcare organizations.

5 CONCLUSION

Artistic practice offers physicians a meaningful pathway to cultivate well-being, strengthen professional competencies, and sustain long-term engagement in clinical work. Evidence from music, visual arts, and narrative practices shows that artistic activities enhance communication, emotional regulation, teamwork, and cognitive flexibility—skills that directly support the objectives of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). These benefits are particularly relevant in high-intensity medical environments, where burnout and stress remain pervasive challenges. The historical and contemporary examples of physician-artists demonstrate that dual careers are not only feasible but mutually enriching. Integrating artistic practice into medical education and institutional culture may therefore contribute to more resilient, reflective, and balanced professionals. Academic programs, conservatories, and healthcare organizations can play a pivotal role by supporting flexible pathways and recognizing the transferable value of artistic skills. Ultimately, embracing the arts within medicine reinforces a more humanistic, sustainable vision of professional life—one that benefits physicians, patients, and society alike.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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