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PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING

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Journal writing provides quick, easy and low-cost access to a holistic strategy for effective patient self-care and empowerment.

Scientific research has demonstrated that patients who participate in expressive writing experience improved physical health and decreased emotional distress. (*See references to research studies at the end of this presentation folder.*)

In the mid-1980s, Dr. James Pennebaker, a well-respected professor of psychology and research psychologist, studied the impact of cathartic writing on health. He asked subjects to write for only 15 - 20 minutes a day, for four consecutive days, about emotionally difficult topics. At the end of the study, he discovered that his subjects showed physiological changes that correlated to increased immune system functioning. These positive changes lasted up to six weeks after the end of the four-day writing experiment. And even months later, subjects reported fewer visits to health clinics and medical doctors for stress-related illnesses.

A decade later, in 1996-1997, Dr. Joshua Smyth and colleagues replicated Dr. Pennebaker's work with rheumatoid arthritis and asthma sufferers. Subjects were asked to write about "the most stressful event of their lives" for only three days, 20 minutes per day. Four months later, there was "clinically significant" improvement in nearly 50% of the cases. "This is the first study to demonstrate that writing about stressful life experiences improves physician ratings of disease severity in chronically ill patients," writes Dr. Smyth in the April 14, 1999, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. Psychiatrist David Spiegel, MD, comments in an editorial published in the same issue of *JAMA*, "Were the authors to have provided similar outcome evidence about a new drug, it likely would be in widespread use within a short time."