The Colorado Health Foundation™



An Artistic Rendering

Reporting on the 2017 Colorado Health Symposium, Show email*, health care and policy writer and guest blogger for the Colorado Health Foundation, summarizes insights and synthesizes the conversation about one of the most complex social issues of our time - inequity.*

The 2017 Colorado Health Symposium put questions of inequity on the table. The speakers and attendees explored the complex issue and everyone was sent home with a charge to find - and take a seat at - the tables where change happens.

The reality is that many people struggle to envision the word equity, and initiating open and honest conversations about inequity can be difficult. The third day of the Symposium brought dimension and understanding to the theme by addressing inequity through a lens of creative expression.

Three distinct performances – bridging theater, music and poetry – capped off the conversation on inequity with artistic renderings of the concept. Performances from Sarah Jones, the Flobots and Bobby LeFebre added more than a little entertainment – they provided a melody for a movement.

Tony Award-winning actress and writer Sarah Jones donned a powerful rainbow of characters in her one-woman tour-de-force, A Right to Care. “Health starts with the most basic things,” Jones told the Symposium audience, in character as a New York woman experiencing homelessness, explaining what had gone wrong in her life. “When doctors tell me to watch what I eat, I tell them I have to find it first.”

Jones’ wildly diverse array of characters – from a 13-year-old Girl Scout to a Jewish grandmother to a jaded nurse to a Native American activist – testified to an imaginary Congress about their personal health care issues, providing a

multicultural and socio-economic perspective. As a Jewish grandmother still mourning her late husband after his long, expensive illness, she said (of health agencies), “They will never collect enough money to pay for the life they took from my husband and me.”

Expanding the final day’s emphasis on confronting policy through the arts was a plan that the Colorado Health Foundation knew might prove edgy to some. The Symposium event planners said their goal was to inspire and motivate change that embraces equity by tapping into the many forms of creative expression that are alive and thriving. Jones delivered on the edginess, amid much laughter, including her Long Island nurse character admonishing people to avoid developing a “victim mentality.”

Jones’ Native American character deadpanned, “If anything I said today here makes anyone uncomfortable, I can only say, you’re welcome.”

To close the Symposium, the alternative hip-hop band, Flobots, brought their social consciousness to a rocking stage. The band told and rapped stories of personal empathy and compassion.

“While we cannot choose our neighbors, we get to choose whether we will be the kind of neighbor others want to be around,” Flobot band member Stephen Brackett said. Their rap underlined the message:

> “Let me fall and fumble,
> Let my soul be humbled.
> Let me fail and falter,
> Let my heart be altered.”

From there, poet Bobby LeFebre sent the crowd home with his personal brand of fierce humor: “If you are not invited to the table, it is possible you are on the menu,” he said, with the Flobots’ band playing a rhythm line behind him.

LeFebre picked up the Symposium theme of putting equity on the table and taking a seat to talk about it, and took it further, as artists are licensed to do:

“For it is not enough to merely have a seat at the table; one must be the designer of it. . . Conflict can be a garden that change grows in.

Let's grow things together. Let us sit at this new table, pass our stories around like bread, eat, be fed, be healthy, be heard.”

The lights may have dimmed in Keystone, but the conversation isn’t over. Rather, it is just beginning.

View recordings and presentations of most of the 2017 Symposium’s plenary and keynote speakers here.

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Blog

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