



Keynote speech given by  
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First national

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Arts in Health  
Conference & Showcase  
for health decision makers  
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Presented in association with  
the College of Medicine and NHS Alliance

.....  
Royal Festival Hall

.....  
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Secretary of State for Health, Chair of NHS England, Chair of Arts Council England, distinguished guests from the arts and health worlds, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this sell-out first national arts in health event for health decision-makers, presented by Aesop. Thank you so much for coming.

As you will be seeing today, the arts have enormous potential to deliver health improvements, but there are barriers to their introduction which need to be removed. A key way to do this is to form a stronger relationship between health and the arts. This event today is an important milestone towards that new relationship.

We are fortunate in this country. The health and arts sectors are both world class. But just a word about 'the arts'. People automatically think Leonardo, ballet and opera singers and think it's not for them. The arts are so much more than these.

They're the book group, film club, dance group or community choir you belong to. There are over 49,000 of these arts groups in the UK involving 10 million people. It's the music you love, pop, jazz, world, classical. It's movies, its pictures, it's the irresistible desire to dance when your favourite track plays. We love the arts.

Yet health is not harnessing the astonishing levels of engagement that the arts achieve.

And there's a widespread view in health that the arts are nothing but fluff, nice-to-have and peripheral. Certainly nothing to do with the day job.

And the arts sector? Time to hold its hands up too. It hasn't tuned enough into today's health challenges, how the complex health system actually works and crucially, how to provide robust evidence of what works. And another problem is the arts business model. Most arts in health programmes rely on charitable donations. This guarantees that most will remain projects, never rolled-out national programmes.

Last bit of bad news: we are being held back by a lack of professional development to connect the health and arts worlds (although important development work is being done by the Arts Council's excellent Cultural Commissioning Programme)

Arts and health is an agenda which is now going places

- The Reader Organisation is a social enterprise. It achieves annual commission income of over £2m and operates across England.
- Last week, Breathe Magic won the NHS Rehab Innovation Challenge Award worth £50,000.
- And the evidence-base is growing, including the excellent work on singing at the Sidney de Haan Research Centre.
- At the policy level we have an increasingly engaged health sector and the energetic leadership of Sir Peter Bazalgette at Arts Council England.

Where could the arts most add value? I suggest two areas.

- The first is arts interventions addressing specific health challenges.
- The second is programmes contributing to the wider social prescribing agenda, capable of improving wellbeing and reducing health demand
- Both sorts of interventions must have the characteristics which the health system expects
  - Effective, cost-effective and sustainable
  - evidence-based and of consistent quality
  - capable of going to scale

What's Aesop doing to advance this agenda:

- We've already linked the arts with health economics, a vital step to establish cost effectiveness, and we've developed a planning tool and a standards of evidence framework
- Today we're launching two more essential tools
- An evaluation and development framework commissioned by Public Health England and the Aesop Marketplace – think of it as online dating site for health commissioners and arts in health programmes.

Finally we have exciting plans to address one of those other barriers to progress. We are setting up with health and arts

partners, the Aesop Institute to address the lack of professional development.

In my mind there are three key next steps needed to deliver potential of the arts to health:

- Secretary of State, I have one specific ask of you – and don't worry, no money need change hands – a message from the top, giving the health system permission to consider arts in health programmes would send a strong message.
- Second a national professional development programme would really help get health and arts professionals to work together effectively
- A programme of business focusing and growth to help take effective arts interventions to scale. It's something the venture philanthropy world is so good at. You know who are.

To finish, I want to express warmest thanks to our partners and supporters (all listed in your programme), to all the showcase contributors, the wonderful Aesop team and lastly to my collaborator on this event, the one who sowed the initial seed, Dr Michael Dixon.

I hope you blown away by what you see today and want to play your part in a quantum leap for arts in health.

Thank you