

Advancing Creativity and Connection in Healthcare Organizations

Growing up in Perth, Australia—a city known for its innovation born of geographic isolation and resourcefulness—I developed an early appreciation for how human ingenuity can transform systems, outcomes, and experiences. This perspective deepened during my tenure at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, where I led special projects and gained firsthand insights into the complexities of healthcare management. These experiences shaped my understanding of creativity as a vital yet often overlooked everyday process that leaders, health professionals, and patients use to navigate challenges and drive innovation in modern healthcare systems.

Since joining HPM, my research has focused on fostering creativity as a means of strengthening healthcare organizations through the insights of both patients and professionals. As the field evolves through transformative eras—value-based care, the Covid-19 pandemic, digital health, and artificial intelligence—creativity has shown to enhance patient outcomes, team performance, and clinician well-being. My work examines how organizations can become more adaptive and innovative, evolving into Learning Health Systems that integrate continuous learning, evidence-based practices, and creative problem-solving to drive sustainable improvements.

My scholarship builds on three interconnected themes. First, I explore the role of patients as active partners in healthcare innovation. Through this lens, I highlight how patients' lived experiences and creative ideas can uncover hidden inefficiencies and inspire human-centered care practices. I also develop rigorous methods to elicit and integrate these ideas into routine operations. Second, I focus on primary care teams, the foundation of effective healthcare delivery. My recent work on primary care team creativity demonstrates how fostering creativity improves perceptions of care quality, reduces clinician burnout, and enhances job satisfaction. Previous research has illuminated the organizational and interpersonal supports that enable these teams to leverage creativity to improve patient care experiences. Third, I examine the critical balance between standardization and creativity in healthcare. While standardization ensures safety and efficiency, my research shows how healthcare professionals can harmonize creativity and standardization to achieve successful patient outcomes and foster a sense of professional mastery within their organizations—both in professional practice and while navigating systems.

Together, these themes converge within the Learning Health System framework, which envisions organizations as adaptive, data-informed, and innovation-driven. By bridging academic inquiry with actionable strategies, my work provides tools for leaders to cultivate creativity as a driver of continuous improvement. My goal is to support healthcare organizations in their dual pursuits of reliability and innovation by identifying deliberate strategies to elicit and integrate creative ideas from teams, clinicians, and the patients they serve. Finally, this research evolves and comes to life through the insights and perspectives of our HPM community—colleagues, students, and alumni. Their engagement and creativity ensure that I, too, am continuously learning and growing.

– Dr. Yuna Lee, December 2024