



# Creative Literature as a Path to Empathy in the Health Profession

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# Background





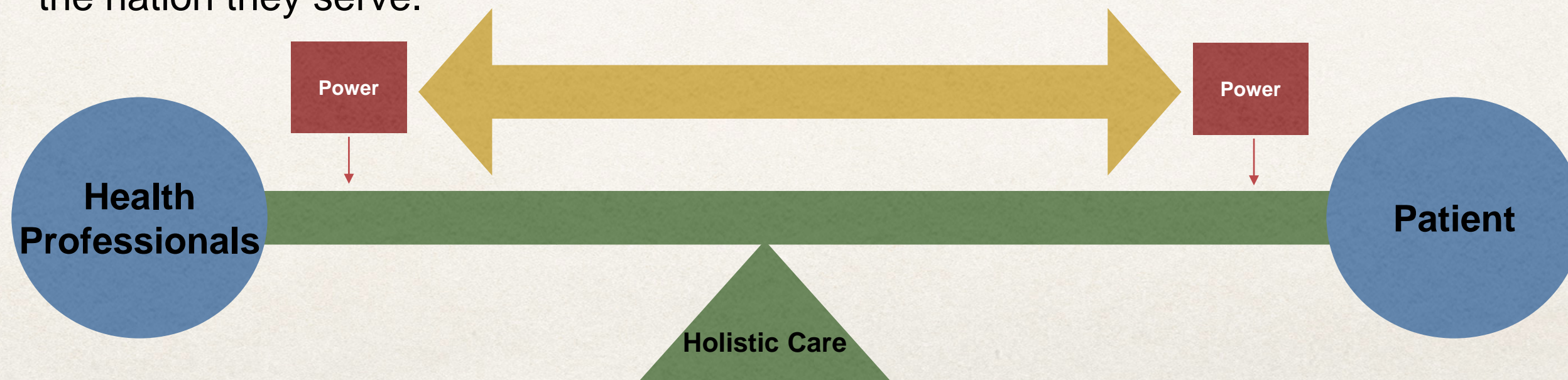


❖ Picture source: <http://www.electives.net/country/95>



# Method

- Explore the value of creative literature through literature reviews
- Examine the works of various South African Health Professional authors.
- Argue that creative literature written by health professionals contributes to empathetic interaction between health professionals and the nation they serve.





# Literature as a Tool for Empathetic Interaction Between Doctors and Patients

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- Patient centered medicine is a “*two person medicine*”.<sup>[3]</sup>
- The health professional and patient influence each other and cannot be considered separately.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Tim Gillespie: “Literature cultivates imagination and empathy”<sup>[2]</sup>

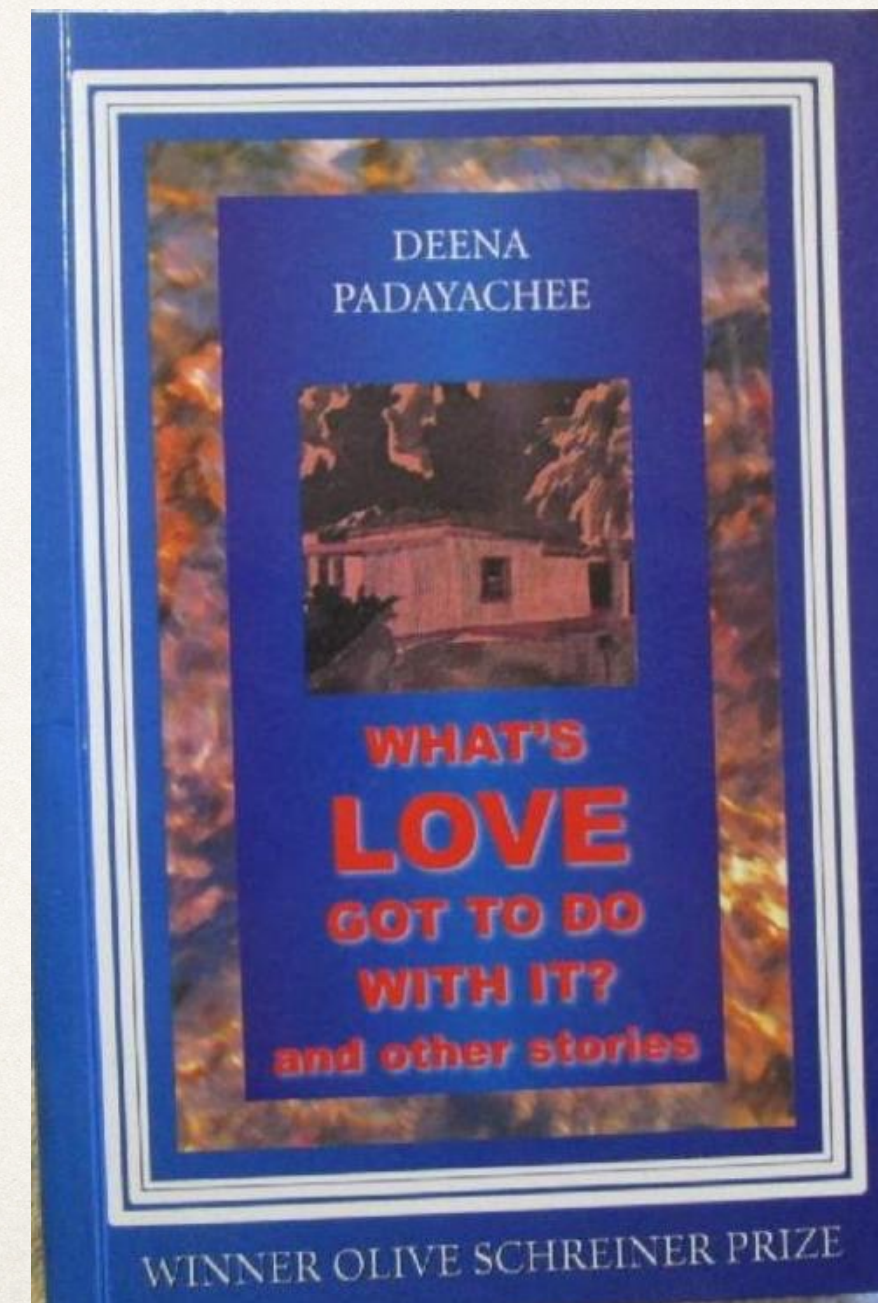




# What's Love Got to do With It?

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Deena Padayachee, writes in his book What's Love Got To Do With It about the experience of living in post apartheid South Africa. Through the stories Padayachee unravels **identity, social status, culture, success and justice**. Although stories are an author's creation, they have the potential to give the public, who at some point become patients, **a level ground to relate on human terms. Relatability and representation** fosters a sense of confidence that health professionals understand the background and the political history of the patients that knock on their consultation door.





# Literature as a Tool for Empathetic Interaction Between Doctors and Colleagues

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- Different perspectives and wider worlds without pressure and judgement<sup>[2]</sup>.
- Winefield et al: “Patient centeredness as attention by the doctor to cues of the affective relationship as it develops between the parties, including self awareness of emotional responses.”<sup>[4]</sup>

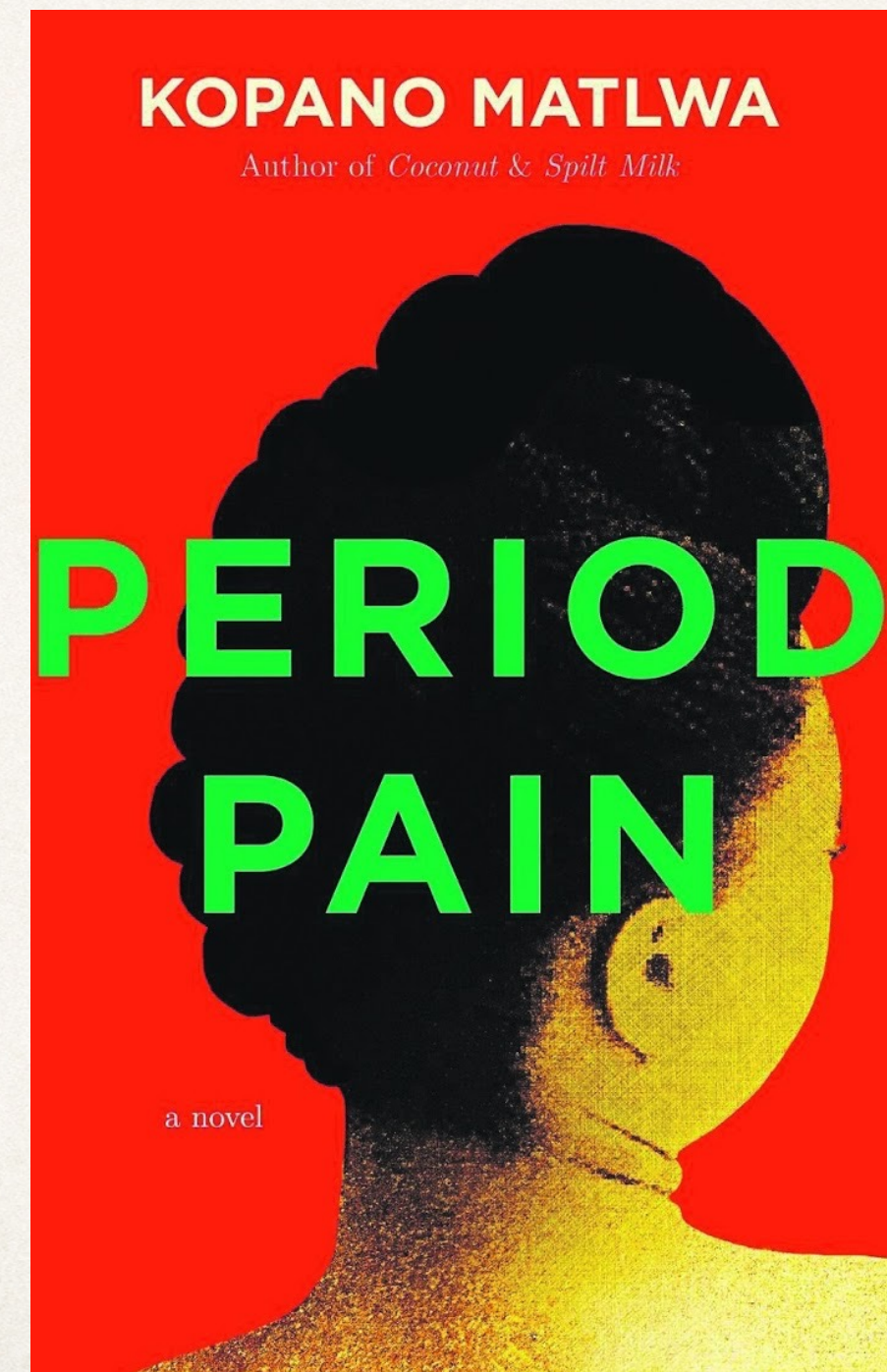




# Period Pain

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In *Period Pain*, Kopano Matlwa, a South African qualified medical doctor builds a story around the protagonist Masechaba who herself is a medical doctor in South Africa. Through the eyes of Masechaba, the doctor introduces **socio-political issues, gender, class and xenophobia which affect South Africans** on a professional, social and personal level. The story invites the reader to reflect on the state of the country, the period it is in, marred by many difficulties. Matlwa ventures into the experience of medical doctors working in the public sector, and through her characters health professionals may find areas that they **relate** with and that allows them to understand their colleagues better.





# Literature as a Tool for Empathetic Interaction Between Doctors and the Public

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- Enlarges a reader's sense about the many possible ways to live - national ethos.<sup>2</sup>
- Patient centered approach requires a “willingness to become involved in the full range of difficulties patients bring to their doctors, not just their biomedical problems”.<sup>4</sup>
  - Inter-sectoral collaboration
  - Aspiring health professionals

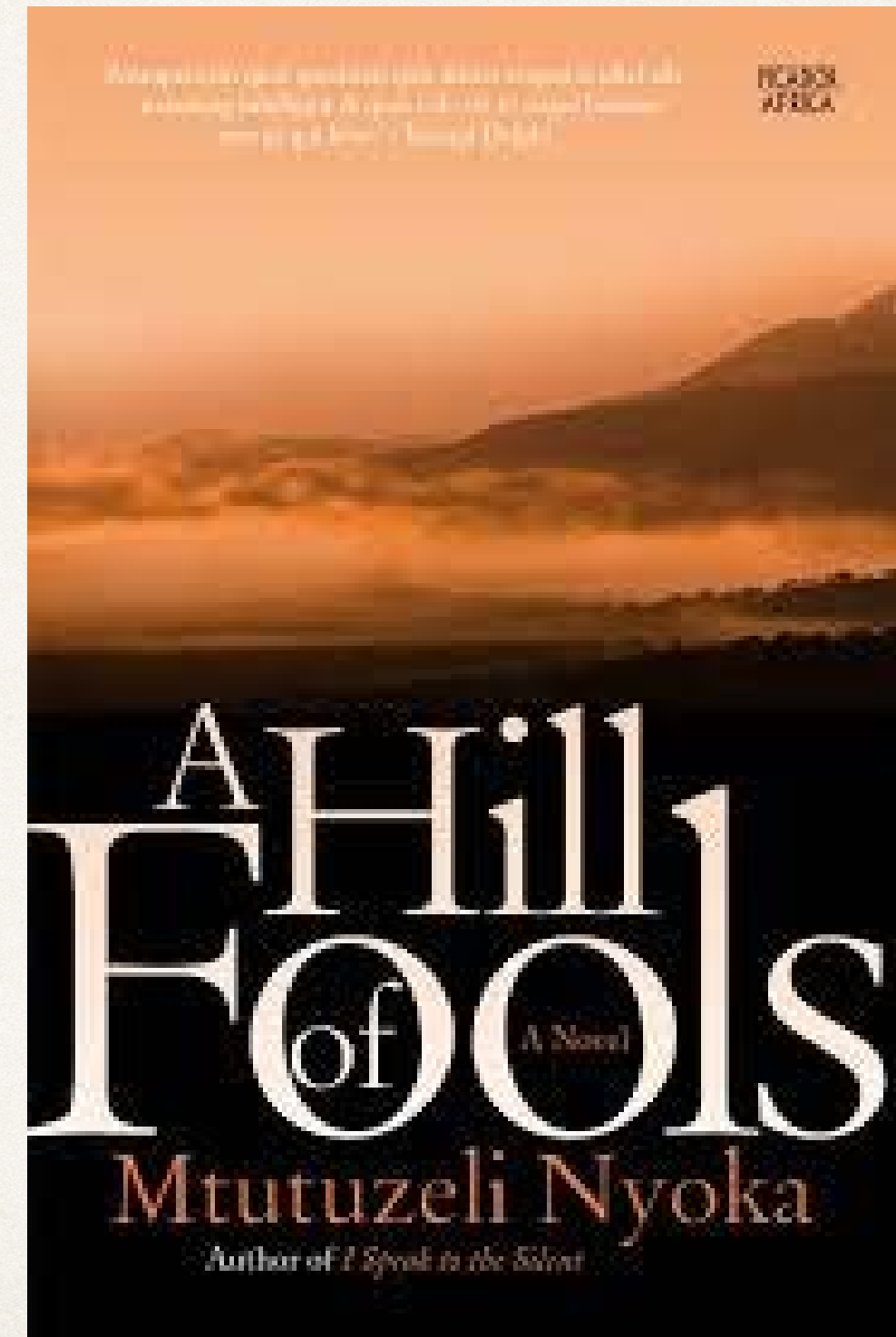




# A Hill of Fools

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The themes of **governance, slavery and corruption** interrogated by Mtutuzeli Nyoka, an ENT surgeon in his book *A Hill of Fools* show that the health professional considers large scale issues which have implications on the poor and marginalized. Although the book is not about the practice of medicine, it is instead a fictional work depicting life in a fictional country of Doma and the effects of slavery on this country, one can from it, extract points that can be extrapolated into the health care sector. **It opens leaders to consider how their power contributes negatively or positively to the health of the nation.**

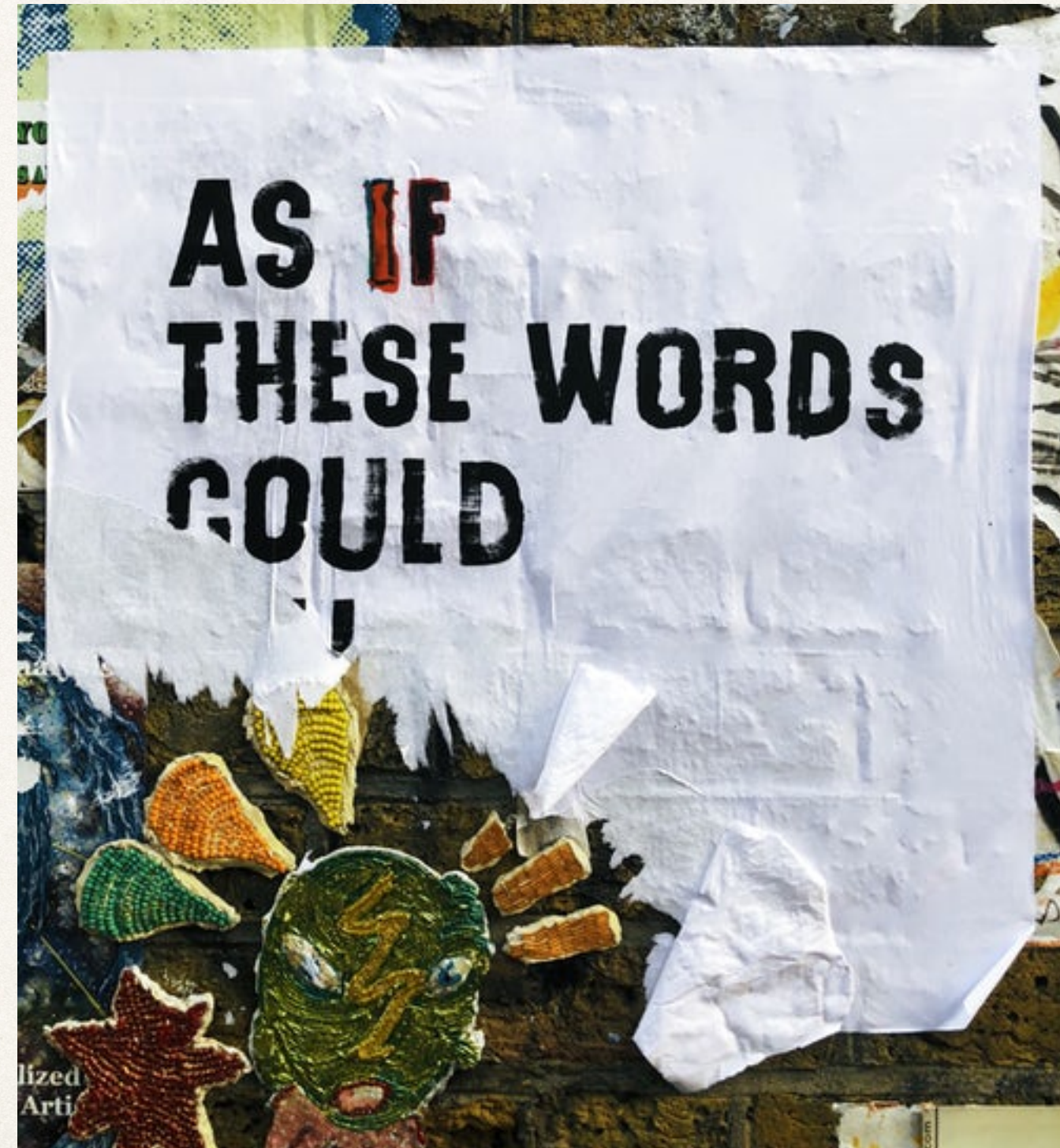




## Conclusion

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Through literature, readers travel to different locales, to the past, the present, the future, and learn during these travels about other cultures and peoples. Literature thus might be the antidote to the disease that disconnects the health professional from her patients, the health professional from his colleagues, the doctors from the wider south African community .





# In Summary

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Stories written by health professionals carry the potential to build a bridge between doctors and the patients they serve, between doctors and their colleagues as well as between doctors and stakeholders outside the medical fraternity.





# References

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# The End

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