

The Research Ambassador Program

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National Science Foundation
<http://www.nsf.gov>
Informal Science Education Program: NSF
0322214



National Geographic Society
Conservation Trust program
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/conservation/index.html>



The International Canopy Network
<http://www.evergreen.edu/ican>



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THE RESEARCH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

TREES AND HEALING



An outreach project by researchers to
communicate science to public audiences.

RESEARCH SCENARIO No. 8

RESEARCH AMBASSADOR

Why trees and healing?

Trees provide important medicines for humans, such as Taxol, which derived from the Pacific yew and used to treat ovarian cancer. Trees can also provide hope and inspiration for the recovery of injured and ill people. A forest ecologist spoke to groups of medical students and health practitioners about the connections between trees and healing and how trees can be used to inspire patients and speed their recovery processes.



Trees lead by example

Trees can help heal humans directly by providing medicines from their tissues and extracts. Trees can also help heal people by being examples for living with injury or disease. Images of trees can be projected in hospital rooms as inspirations to recovering patients. Amputee victims may benefit from learning of trees that have lost limbs, yet endure and continue to be strong and vibrant in spite of their injury. Cancer patients may be consoled to learn that many trees with tumors, called burls, sustain themselves for centuries.

TREES AND HEALING

To see a tree

A behavioral psychology study showed that patients who underwent the same surgery healed at different rates, dependent upon the view from their window. Patients who viewed a tree were in the hospital significantly fewer days, required fewer narcotics, and had significantly fewer complications from their surgeries than those who viewed a blank wall.



What were the outcomes?

Results from the study about patient views in hospital rooms has influenced the design of hospitals and centers for the elderly. 65% of medical student residents thought the talk given by the forest ecologist was useful or very useful in improving their ability to treat patients. Several doctors indicated they were more open to these non-traditional forms of healing because they were presented by an established academic colleague in a scientific (though non-medical) field.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM?

A major problem facing our society is the widening gap between humans and nature, exacerbated by the lack of connections among science, scientists and society. The Research Ambassador Program helps bridge those gaps by providing academic scientists with rewards and incentives to do direct outreach to the public.

The Research Ambassador Program, established in 2003, has recruited scientists from many disciplines in academia and trained them to do outreach, especially in non-traditional venues such as churches, prisons, skateboard parks and hospitals. Researchers link their research to the interest of an existing profession, trade or interest group, and give talks or write popular articles about their research as it relates to that public audience. Rewards for scientists include a financial honorarium, a letter of thanks from a high-ranking official and contacts to do outreach in the local community.