Literature, Medicine and Public Health

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Course Description

This course employs fiction to introduce topics of current importance in clinical and social medicine. Specific areas to be covered include homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, stigmatization, suffering, death, the physician and war, the family and society, aging, human subject experimentation, the doctor-patient relationship, and humor in medicine. Readings include selections by Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, George Orwell, Pearl S Buck, Doris Lessing, Shusaku Endo, Grace Paley, John Updike, Elie Wiesel, Ethan Canin, and Michael Lacombe; these will be supplemented by clinical studies, reviews, and editorials from the current medical literature.

Students are expected to gain an appreciation of the reciprocal relationships between literature, clinical medicine, public health, and medical ethics. They will explore how questions pertinent to the care of individuals and communities and to ethical dilemmas can be investigated through critical analysis of both literary works and scientific studies.

The course will meet for two hours per week for ten weeks and is open to all medical and graduate nursing students. Group discussion will be emphasized, and lecture time kept to a minimum. Estimated reading time is approximately 1 to 2 hour per week. Grading is pass/fail and is based on class participation; there are no papers and no final exam.
Syllabus

**Week 1 - Introduction; Disease/Suffering:**

**Week 2 - The Doctor-Patient Relationship:**
Kornrich WJ. An Old Horse. JAMA 1989;262:2902.
Peabody FW. The Care of the Patient. JAMA 1927;88:877-82.

**Week 3 - Death:**
Blaise pacal. “Man is only a reed…” Ibid.

**Week 4 - The Physician and War:**

**Week 5 - The Family and Society:**
Week 6-Aging:
Ethan Canin. We are Nighttime Travelers. From Emperor of the Air (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).
Laurie Lee. From Cider with Rosie. From The Oxford Book of Death, op. cit.
Dylan Thomas. “Do not go gentle into that good night.” Ibid.
Michael Blumenthal. “Who will live in our houses when we die?”

Week 7-Domestic Violence:
Isaac NE et al. Men who batter: profile from a restraining order database. Arch Fam Med 1994;3

Week 8-Homelessness:

Week 9-Human Subject Experimentation:

Week 10-Humor; Wrap-Up:
Bennett HJ. Keeping up with the literature. JAMA 1992;267:920.
Lee RV. A modest proposal for preventing elder folk from being a burden to their children or country, and making them beneficial to the public. J Clin Epidemiol 1989;42:593-5.

Public Health and Social Justice Website
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