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. Note that all readings by MT Donohoe are available at http://www.publichealthandsocialjustice.org.

Objectives:

By the end of the course, students are expected to

- Develop an appreciation of the reciprocal relationships between literature, clinical medicine, public health, and medical ethics.
- Analyze works of fiction and non-fiction relevant to medicine and public health in terms of tone, style, point of view, characterization, and use of symbolism and metaphor.
- Discuss 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.
- Articulate comparisons between different writers’ approaches to medical and public health topics.
- Share and discuss a favorite poem relevant to medicine and/or public health.
- Write a research paper covering some aspect of the field of literature, medicine, and public health.

The course will meet for two hours twice a week for ten weeks and is open to .

Grading:

Class participation – 25%
Biography of a physician or nurse writer (one to two pages) – 15%
Paper describing “A day in my life with….” (students will pick any disease of interest, and based on a review of the disease and its treatments, describe how having such a
disease might affect them physically, mentally, and in terms of their relationships on a typical day) – 15%
Paper discussing a poem of interest and relevant health care topic (5-7 pages, 5-10 references, due end of week 8) – 25%
Final exam – compare and contrast two works discussed in class with respect to literary devices, point of view, and relevant health care issues – 20%

**Syllabus**

**Introduction to Literature and Medicine, Physician Writers**
From The Summing Up, W Somerset Maugham

**Disease/Suffering:**
Schweitzer A. Out of my life and thought.

**The Doctor-Patient Relationship I**

**The Doctor-Patient Relationship II**
Kornrich WJ. An Old Horse. JAMA 1989;262:2902.
Peabody FW. The Care of the Patient. JAMA 1927;88:877-82.
Sexuality, Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Delivery


The Family and Society
Slide show on poverty in America (Donohoe)

Domestic Violence

Aging
Ethan Canin. We are Nightime Travelers. From Emperor of the Air (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).
Dylan Thomas. “Do not go gentle into that good night.” Ibid.
Michael Blumenthal. “Who will live in our houses when we die?”

Death I

Death II, Suicide
Bontemps A. “A Summer Tragedy.” In The Old South: "A Summer Tragedy" and Other Stories of the Thirties (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1973)

Blaise Pascal. Ibid.
Siegel JI. “In the room where my father died.” JAMA Poetry and Medicine 1995;273:460b.

“There is…no death…”


**The Physician and Society**


Exercise on out-of-hospital emergencies and curbside diagnoses (handout, Donohoe)

**Racism**


Discussion of Tuskegee Syphilis Study, participation of African-Americans in medical research, racial differences in access to care and outcomes.

**Immigration/Migrant Health Care**


Poverty, Homelessness
How the Poor Die. George Orwell.
Doris Lessing. An Old Woman and Her Cat. From The Doris Lessing Reader (New York: Knopf, 1988).

Mental Illness

Occupational and Environmental Medicine
Donohoe MT. GE – Bringing Bad Things to Life: Cradle to Grave Health Care and the Alliance between General Electric Medical Systems and New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Synthesis/Regeneration 2006(Fall);41:31-3 (abridged version – complete version available upon request from the author).
Review of causes and health consequences of environmental degradation and social injustice (Donohoe).

The Physician and War

**Human Subject Experimentation**


Review of major developments in human subject experimentation in the 20th Century (Donohoe).

**War**


The Butter Battle Book. Dr. Seuss (Theodore Geisel).


**Medicine and the Arts**

Creativity and disease

Minimata Disease: The photography of W Eugene Smith

**Humor, Wrap-Up, Course Evaluations**


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

**Other sessions:**
**Student presentations**
**Guest presentations by Sue Danielson, Paul Donohoe**