Specialist course in MEDICAL HUMANITIES

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Introduction
Medical Humanities is an academic discipline which aims to make explicit and learn from that which we know intuitively: medicine is an ‘art’ as well as a science. By ‘art’ in this sense, we mean a range of skills and insights that doctors bring to the practice of medicine in addition to an extensive knowledge of the body and how it works. The art of medicine is often regarded as an instinctive compassionate response to fellow humans in difficult, sometimes dire, circumstances. It is for this reason, perhaps, that it has received little attention in traditional medical school curricula. After all, we don’t need to be taught how to be ‘human’. Yet our humanistic responses are shaped by the society in which we live, the language we inhabit, and the representations of illness and healthcare which pervade modern culture. Patients, too, approach the healthcare profession with expectations framed by cultural representations. The discipline of humanities is a branch of learning concerned with the analysis and interpretation of creative acts of cultural representation. As such, humanities in relation to medicine not only provides an appropriate platform for exploring the ways in which medicine has contributed to culture and vice versa, it also offers a set of skills that are useful in any analytical context.

This course gives you an opportunity to encounter a range of perspectives on the ways in which medicine and society interact and inform each other. We will be focusing on three, not entirely separable, areas: literature, visual arts and the media.

Course Structure
The course is officially divided into two modules, 4 and 5. Module 4 is a taught component and Module 5 is for the mini-project. Because of the nature of the course, it is impractical to entirely separate the modules within the time allowed. Some Module 5 preparation takes place before the Easter break and some Module 4 teaching continues after it. This is to allow you sufficient time to develop the skills and undertake the readings to complete each module to a satisfactory standard.

Most classes are seminar-style with students expected to contribute to discussion constructively. The timetable is somewhat eclectic and students must make sure they have checked the venue and time of classes. Unless stated otherwise, morning slots run from 10.00 to 13.00 (except for Wednesdays when classes run from 9.30 to 12.00 to keep the afternoon free for sports); afternoon slots from 14.00 to 17.00. Students may be required to make themselves available outside of these hours for individual consultations, extra film screenings or additional excursions.

Course Requirements
This Medical Humanities course is based on ‘experiential learning’. The very experience of participating in seminar sessions, gallery visits, excursions, film viewings, etc. is essential: this is not the sort of knowledge you can acquire through reading a textbook or copying a friend’s lecture notes. **Students must attend ALL sessions.** If exceptional circumstances mean that absence is unavoidable, the tutor should be notified (in advance if possible). Documentary evidence may be required.
Perhaps in contrast to many of your clinical courses, your interpretation is key to your studies in medical humanities. This presents a different, and no less difficult, challenge to assimilating a body of knowledge or acquiring competence with medical equipment. It requires you to be constantly evaluating what you read, see and feel, and attempting to articulate the reasons a particular response has been evoked. What other legitimate responses might be elicited in different circumstances by different individuals? This self-reflection – mapping the evolution of your thoughts on a particular issue – is essential if you are to benefit from the course. The ability to marshal complex ideas from a variety of sources into a reasoned argument is a skill you'll be expected to demonstrate informally in seminar sessions and through formal assessment. Constructing an argument is different to holding an opinion.

Inevitably, there is a reading, writing and viewing load associated with a course of this type. **Core texts must be read in preparation for scheduled classes.**

The course involves some practical creative activity. Occasionally you will be asked to produce a piece of creative writing or art that does not form part of the formal assessment. No artistic ability is required for this, just a willingness to attempt the exercise and to respect the attempts of others.

**Assessment**
The course is assessed through two coursework assignments, a project and a presentation. Further details of these will be given during scheduled classes and detailed instructions are given in the assignment booklet.

**Assignment 1.** Feature article suitable for publication in the *Student BMJ*. Due in March (20%).

**Assignment 2.** Analytical essay on poetry or film (1200 words). Due in April (20%)

**Project:** Visual work to be handed in to the Blyth gallery. Write-up to be submitted electronically on the specified submission date in May (40%).

**Presentation:** The presentations take place in May, in the week following the submission of the mini-project. Ten minutes are allowed for each presentation with five minutes for questions (20%)

**Reading list and viewings**
Most of the readings required for this course will be provided in electronic format on the course Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard/WebCT: http://webct.imperial.ac.uk/webct) or as photocopies. However, you will need to study some texts in detail and it is recommended that you purchase a copy of these four books:


In addition to films shown in class, additional titles will be recommended and you are encouraged to view as many of these as you can.

**Feedback on the Course**
We care passionately about the course and are constantly striving to improve it, and make it as useful and interesting to students as possible. We value your comments, suggestions and
feedback. While there are some aspects that are out of our control (such as the allocation process and the room bookings), we would like to hear from you if there are things we can improve (such as the course structure, the topics covered, the instructions for assignments, or the range in teaching approaches). Feedback informally in class or by meeting with one of us is helpful and allows us to address problems as they arise. It is also very useful if you fill out SOLE for the course.

Prizes
The Max Bonn Memorial prize of £100 is awarded to the best student in Medical Humanities. Students taking Medical Humanities are also eligible for other BSc course prizes. Prizes for the Medical Monopoly scavenger hunt are sponsored by Pfizer’s medical humanities initiative.

Course aims and learning objectives
The Medical Humanities course has been carefully structured to explore a number of important, interconnected themes. Because of practical constraints on the timetable, and to give you enough preparation time for parts of the course which require reading time, these themes run concurrently. The course will explore theoretical ideas in association with these areas, but there are also workshops which develop practical skills.

Module 4 (coursework)

Theme: The medical gaze
‘The medical gaze’, a concept articulated by the French philosopher Foucault, is often invoked in discussions about power relationships in the doctor–patient relationship. It provides a useful framework for looking at institutional contexts of medical practice, and cultural representations that reinforce or challenge the predominant gaze.

Aims
- To introduce the concept of the medical gaze and relate it to a range of literary and visual examples
- To give a historical overview of the way in which imaging technology has contributed to political contexts of healthcare
- To discuss preconceptions and stereotypes in medical practice.
- Explore the role of the healer.
- Discuss notions of stereotype, ritual and the concept of ‘performative medicine’.

Learning objectives
On completing the course, students should be able to:
- Critique the concept of the ‘medical gaze’
- Consider how the way doctors look at patients has changed over time
- Explain how images and texts can function rhetorically with reference to specific historical and contemporary examples

Theme: Narrative and representation
One of the most ambitious claims made for the study of literature in medicine is that the narrative and observational skills acquired in literary and filmic analysis are invaluable in medicine. This theme will give you an opportunity to explore literature written by and written about doctors. Patients’ stories, of which pathographies are a growing genre, are examined here and related to narrative medicine. Powerful cinematographic portrayals of illness are also examined in this context. We look at the implications of this for doctor–patient dynamics. An understanding of ‘representation’ is also integral to the relationship between observer and subject. These are essential concepts in the discipline of medical humanities.
Aims
- To explain the concept of representation, its use in film theory and its relevance to critical social thinking
- Define and discuss literary concepts such as narrative framing, plot and characterisation and apply them to literary texts
- Provide a structural framework for analyzing texts of the three different formats of novel, short story and poetry
- Discuss the image of the doctor in literature and film
- Introduce concepts of framing, hanging and display in relation to visual art.
- Explain ‘metaphor’ and show how it authorizes expectations and acts as a heuristic

Learning objectives
- Critically discuss a range of authors and texts using appropriate literary terminology
- Discuss the role of the doctor in examples from Western literature
- Evaluate the portrayal of doctors in film
- Describe ‘narrative’ and discuss its scope and limitations for medicine
- Understand the concept of representation and be able to employ it in relation to visual and textual narratives
- Employ and explain appropriate display techniques in visual art
- Analyse, with reference to examples, types of patient pathographies, their strengths and shortcomings
- Demonstrate self-awareness in body language, posture and voice projection
- Discuss the military metaphor in medical and lay discourse

Theme: Medical and biomedical culture
Western biomedical culture is shaped by education, training and ritual. There are different perspectives on the socio-cultural models of medicine which influence medical practice and policy. In this theme we look at the way the medicine is ‘constructed’ in the media, in literature and in film. We examine the persuasive techniques that underpin the advancement of a particular line of argument, and do they reflect and/or generate culturally prevalent images of medicine?

Aims
- To use literature and film to explore ethical issues in relation to cultural differences in health care
- To introduce concepts of professional ethics in the sphere of medical journalism
- To explore a case study in which ethical issues are invoked
- To introduce art therapy in a healthcare setting.
- Discuss the literary representation of institutional settings for treating mental illness
- Describe the way in which pharmacological advertising constructs mental illness
- Engender confidence in presentation skills
- To explain the use of psychoanalysis in film studies

Learning outcomes
- Explain how point-of-view, plot and characterisation in narrative shed light on ethical stances in literature and film
- Discuss key concepts in art therapy.
- Recognise and discuss the importance of acknowledging cultural difference in patient care.
- Critique the depiction of mental illness in psychotropic advertising
- Discuss the portrayal of mental illness in cinema with reference to specific examples
Module 5 (project and presentation)
The project is an opportunity to explore aspects of the themes covered in the coursework in more depth.

Aims
- Develop research skills using a variety of media, including primary and secondary sources.
- Introduce research methodology in the medical humanities.
- Discuss the value of reflection and the role of processed reflection in research.
- Provide an experiential learning opportunity on which students can draw to formulate projects.
- Assist students to organize findings, and present them in written and oral form.

Learning outcomes
- Draw on the disciplines of medicine and humanities to research an appropriate project topic.
- Reveal a degree of originality and insight in terms of the choice and development of the topic.
- Explain how the artwork relates both to ideas and a body of theory at an appropriate level of detail.
- Explain the choice and appropriateness of artistic medium (photography, collage, sculpture, painting, performance, video, etc.) in relation to representing ideas, with an awareness of the possibilities and limitations of the medium.
- Show evidence that you have taken into account relevant sources from the course and external sources (literature, poetry, film and the media).
- Show evidence of planning and an ability to review progress.
- Adopt an overall layout and style of report that uses good English and is appropriate and clear.
- Offer clear, logical arguments that relate to key Medical Humanities themes.
- Draw clear, rational and informed conclusions and processed reflections from researching and making artwork.
- Deliver a well-researched presentation to a high standard, including appropriate visual material.
- Demonstrate an ability to answer questions effectively and engage with an audience on the topic of the mini-project.

What do the students think of the specialist course in Medical Humanities?
‘The Medical Humanities taught module is a wonderful opportunity to explore the idea of medicine, looking at how medicine influences or is influenced by society, how doctors influence their patients, how practising medicine changes a person, and discover what it really means to be a doctor... It is a course that offers a lot of insight into how we practice medicine and makes you think about why you are doing it. It is excellently taught by people who are passionate and insightful about their subject, and who show a genuine interest in their students. They guide you through challenging assessments that require skills that many of us, as scientists, have not previously developed and that can be both daunting and rewarding. Literature, poetry, art, advertising, film, anthropology... there is a wide range of subjects that the course touches on with trips to art galleries, afternoons analysing film, discussions with authors... It is fun but it is not easy, and it is totally unlike anything else you will have the opportunity to do at medical school. Of my time at Imperial, nothing made me more passionate about becoming a doctor than this course, I would highly recommend it.’
What does the external examiner think of the specialist course in Medical Humanities?

‘This programme is exceptional in its delivery of gold standard learning outcomes that one might expect of an undergraduate Medical Humanities programme. The intermedial materials, the broad range of assessment modes and the formative and summative feedback used are all very impressive.

The programme is wonderfully creative in terms of teaching methods deployed and the high level of its innovation is evidenced by the fluent, sophisticated, thoughtful work produced by its students.

The different assessment modes: traditional essay, student article, art project, reflective log and group presentation all build towards an incredibly well-rounded and diverse palette of requirements and skills-acquisition which both stretch and extend students.

To summarise its strengths here, in pursuing the aim to develop high levels of self-reflexivity and critical awareness in its students, it uses a broad range of primary materials and requires students to undertake a diverse range of tasks and learning which really develops their confidence in their own creativity. This creativity is a model for their eventual clinical practice.’