

*Grand Rounds: Exploring the Literary Symptoms of Illness through Narrative*

Doctors have been swearing by the Hippocratic Oath for centuries, recognizing that “there is art to medicine as well as science.” But what exactly does this entail? In this mini-course, we will immerse ourselves within the art of medicine by entering into the realm of illness narratives. Amidst this genre, rooted in the medical humanities, we will focus on the intersection of Literature and Medicine. How do these two worlds intertwine? This literary perspective will illuminate the experience of illness from outside the scope of science. While paying particular attention to literary expressions of this experience, we will also explore multiple modalities of expressing illness, ranging from literary expressions such as novels and poetry to other artistic expressions including music, art, and dance.

In medical education, health practitioners embark on Grand Rounds by discussing individual patient cases at their bedsides. This course will be structured in parallel to this approach; each week, we will explore a different aspect of medicine through the lens of a different literary genre. Through literary theory, novels, short stories, poetry, memoir, and children’s literature, we will explore abstract illness, mental illnesses like depression, physical illnesses like the locked-in syndrome, disabilities like autism, cancer, and terminal illness.

Questions to be explored include:

- How do different genres of literature illuminate illness differently? What aspects of illness are made visible by some genres, overshadowed in others?
- What insight do literature and other artistic mediums provide into the illness experience? What are their limitations?
- How is illness represented, and what are the implications of these representations?
- What do these texts reflect about conceptualizations of the mind and the body? How does literature manipulate these understandings?
- How does illness affect individuals? How does it affect those around them?
- How can literature play a role in the acceptance of illness?
- Ultimately, why should we study literature from the perspective of illness narratives? How does this perspective add dimension to literary analysis, and how can it be applied to patient interactions in the medical field?

This course is designed to allow individuals interested in medicine, nursing, public health, medical anthropology, or clinical psychology, other health-related fields to gain an understanding of illness as expressed by patients. This interdisciplinary approach strives to enhance a humanistic perspective of medicine.

Course requirements will include engaging in weekly readings, reflecting with short blog entries, and contributing thoughtfully to class discussions. For the final project, students will have the opportunity to analyze a preexisting illness narrative or to create their own representation of illness.



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