



News and Views
from the INSTITUTE
FOR THE
MEDICAL HUMANITIES

Vol. 3, No. 1



September 2009

ESSAY

MEDICAL HUMANITIES—
THE ELEVATOR SPEECH

One of the problems that bedevils us in the medical humanities is explaining to the remainder of the world just what it is that we do. Like everyone else in today's medical and academic worlds, we spend a certain amount of our time trying to raise funds. A recent discussion with one of our insightful colleagues in the development office led to the proposal that the Institute needs an "elevator speech." If one of us found ourselves riding in an elevator with someone who we wanted to influence, but who had no knowledge of medical humanities, what could we say to that person within the time allowed before he/she had to exit the elevator?

We thought the elevator speech was a good idea and so did what we often do when we seek to get the creative juices of the Institute flowing—we asked our graduate students.

We announced the "elevator speech contest" and the winner turned out to be Julie Kutac. Her entry is as follows:

Medical humanists use an interdisciplinary approach to engage in the study of the moral, ethical, and legal dimensions of medicine and biomedical research. Grounding their work in the disciplinary traditions of art, history, law, literature, philosophy and religious studies, humanists work to deeply answer two constellations of questions. The first set of questions tackles the moral underpinnings of medicine: What does a morally rich practice of medicine or medical



Julie Kutac

research involve? How are we, as moral citizens, to address the larger systemic social problems of inequalities in health care? What is the good for medicine and science?

The second group of questions is pedagogical in nature: How are we to teach students the reflective habits of being that comprise the virtuous physician or researcher? How do we cultivate the virtues of compassion and empathy within the practice of medicine? How do we teach students to respond to patients who are at their most vulnerable? How do we teach the skills of clinical discernment and human pathos? In what ways can we teach students to become reflective healers and conscientious citizens?

What sets the medical humanities apart from other areas of inquiry is its focus upon the Renaissance ideal of *humanitas*. Our educational program seeks to cultivate cognitive and emotive knowledge through the cultivation and refinement of both the mind and the self, all in an effort to better engage and act within the world. The medical humanities are not to be simply studied in the ivory tower; they are to be practiced within the hospital, in the classroom, and in the broader community.

I believe that Julie has done a nice job of touching upon the most important elements of "medical humanities" that we value at the Institute. If I had to pull out three I'd pick *interdisciplinary*, *reflection*, and *practice*. We value the special conversations about health care that can only occur when people speak across their disciplinary comfort zones. We value our resolute endeavors to find time and space for thoughtful reflection, in a workplace and within curricula that so often seem to prefer knee-jerk reaction—convinced that deep reflection puts us better in touch with the wellsprings of human meaning that we constantly discover. And we value living and working in a

place of practice, where people come every day with serious problems of illness and suffering, which our clinical colleagues then do their best to ameliorate.

—Howard Brody

NEWS FROM IMH GRADUATES

The Polio Years in Texas: Battling a Terrifying Unknown by **Heather Wooten**, PhD, is set for release mid-October 2009 by Texas A & M University Press. It is already available for preorder through Texas A & M University Press or through Amazon. A book launch is scheduled for November 12, 2009, at the Michael B. Menard House in Galveston.

Wooten has also been asked by the Texas State Historical Association (TSHA) to write a book on the history of IMH's home turf, Old Red, as part of the TSHA's Fred Rider Cotten Popular History Series.



Craig Klugman, PhD, has been named to the Stewart & Marianne Reuter Endowed Professorship in Medical Humanities at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics. Klugman was also involved in the launch of Texaslivingwill.org, a web site that educates Texans about advance directives and also assists them in completing them through an online interview program. The program also stores an unsigned copy of the AD which can be changed and modified at any time.



Ryan Greysen, MA, MD, started the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program (RWJCSP) at Yale University this past July. It is one of four sites that offer the two-year program (Yale, Michigan, UCLA, Penn) which is designed to build research and leadership skills for physicians who have completed residency training.



Kayhan Parsi, JD, PhD, has been elected to the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities board of director's as a director-at-large. He will be serving a three-year term as a board member. Parsi is currently an associate professor of bioethics and health policy and graduate program director at Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics and Health Policy, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine in Maywood, Illinois.



Due to Ike, the Institute for the Medical Humanities is now located in the PCP. The Institute's main office is PCP 2.301. Below are the office locations and current phone numbers for our faculty.

(area code 409)

Howard Brody	PCP 2.309	772-9385
Michele Carter	PCP 2.259C	772-5835
Jason Glenn	PCP 2.310	772-9332
Laura Hermer	PCP 2.314	772-9379
Anne Hudson Jones	PCP 2.312	772-5839
E. Bernadette McKinney	PCP 2.311	772-9390
Cheryl Vaiani	PCP 2.259B	747-9113
Harold Vanderpool	PCP 2.259F	772-8865

Robert Rose and William Winslade can be contacted at 772-2376.

Eric Avery can be contacted at 747-9667.



IMH NEWS IN BRIEF

Howard Brody presented the Maurice B. Siegel Lecture at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, California on September 16. He spoke on "The Future of Bioethics: Power and Community Dialogue."

"Little Boy and the Seven Teachings: Meditations for a White Coat Ceremony" was the title of the keynote lecture Brody presented at the White Coat Ceremony for the Class of 2012 at McGill University School of Medicine in Montreal, Canada, on September 25.

