**MEDICAL HUMANITIES ELECTIVE**

*Theater and the Experience of Illness*

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR:** Guy F. Glass, MD, MFA, Clinical Assistant Professor, Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics, Stony Brook University School of Medicine

**PURPOSE:** Studying literary narratives of illness improves our understanding of what it means to suffer and to be a patient. Hopefully, this helps us become more sensitive and humane doctors. Poems, essays, stories and novels all have their use. However, theater has something special to offer; watching a performance is a communal activity evoking a response that goes to the very core of what it means to be human. Contemporary theater is filled with depictions of illness that can both entertain and educate. In short, theater provides a wonderful way to understand the human condition that is more real than any textbook.

**FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS:** The first of five sessions will serve as an introduction to the topic and also as a Grand Rounds. We will discuss several short readings, and watch a video of a performance. In subsequent sessions, we will discuss a play that students will have read in advance. Class participation is necessary to make the discussion work so please come ready to talk about the plays. In addition, at each session, students will volunteer to read scenes aloud at the next class. (No acting experience is necessary.) Academic course credit will be awarded to those who participate in four discussions and complete the electronic Course Survey.

**READINGS** available on the Medical Humanities webpage attached to Course Syllabus:

*Ball & Other Funny Stories About Cancer* by Brian Lobel. A performance piece written/performed by a young man with testicular cancer. **For discussion on September 29, 2016.**

*Wit* by Margaret Edson. The author of this moving play was inspired by her work in the cancer unit of a hospital. **For discussion on October 20, 2016.**

*The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer. A play about the AIDS epidemic with a strong political agenda, written by a noted AIDS activist. **For discussion on December 8, 2016.**

*A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. One of the most influential plays of the 20th Century. We focus on the emotional deterioration of Blanche Dubois, a character inspired by the playwright’s sister, most of whose life was spent in mental institutions. **For discussion on January 12, 2017.**

*A Doctor’s Visit* and *A Nervous Breakdown*. In our final class, we look at short stories about doctors and patients by the great Russian physician/playwright Anton Chekhov, as adapted for the stage by the course instructor, a published playwright. **For discussion on February 16, 2017.**

**SCHEDULE:** There are five sessions on **Thursdays from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m., in Room TBA.**

- **I.** September 29, 2016: *Ball & Other Funny Stories About Cancer* by Brian Lobel. This will also serve as a Grand Rounds.
- **II.** October 20, 2016: *Wit* by Margaret Edson
- **III.** December 8, 2016: *The Normal Heart* by Larry Kramer
- **IV.** January 12, 2017: *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams
- **V.** February 16, 2017: *A Doctor’s Visit and A Nervous Breakdown* by Anton Chekhov, adapted by Guy F Glass.

Registration for this course is at Session I or II. Pre-registration is not required but appreciated to assist in course planning – submit your name to Dr. Glass: gfgmd@aol.com. If you have any questions, please contact the Humanities Academic Coordinator by email: Humanities.coordinator@drexelmed.edu or call: (215) 991-8464. You may also contact Dr. Glass by phone: (917) 972-3770 or by email.

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