MEDICAL HUMANITIES ELECTIVE

LITERATURE & MEDICINE

BOOK CLUB

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Rhonda L. Soricelli, MD, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Drexel University College of Medicine

PURPOSE: Medical students often describe reading for pleasure throughout much of their lives and lament the fact that recreational reading is frequently lost to the pressures and time constraints of medical education. And yet reading beyond medical texts is nourishing to the soul and promotes our understanding of the human condition. Initiated by a group of second year students in 2013, this course will take the form of a traditional book club and is designed for those who are “serious readers” and enjoy discussing what they have read.

REQUIREMENTS: Students must complete assigned readings before each session. Readings have been selected for their “readability” during summer and other vacation times as well as during the school year. Students should make every effort to attend all five Book Club meetings in order for everyone to benefit optimally from the experience. Academic course credit will be awarded to those who participate in four discussions, and complete the electronic Course Survey. Two copies of each reading are available in the Queen Lane Library.

READINGS:

Orphan Train (2013) by Christina Baker Kline. A beautifully crafted, powerful story of the hardship, loneliness and resilience of two women, a 91-year-old wealthy widow and a 17-year-old casualty of the foster care system, whose lives intersect in unlikely but redeeming ways. Meticulously researched, the novel also reveals a little-known period of American history, 1854 – 1929, when “orphan trains” ran regularly from the cities of the East Coast to the Midwest carrying thousands of abandoned children to uncertain futures. Orphan Train is the One Book, One Philadelphia selection for 2015. Recommended for summer reading before discussion on August 17, 2015.

One Hundred Days: My Unexpected Journey from Doctor to Patient (2000), a superb memoir by David Biro. At age 31, just after the completion of his training in Dermatology, Dr. Biro undergoes a bone marrow transplant for a rare blood disorder. Rich with humor and understanding of family dynamics, this is not your usual sick-bed saga. Rather, it is a story told with honesty and integrity, without a shred of self-pity or sentimentality, full of insights on the medical establishment and the uncertainty of life. For discussion on October 5.

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), the Gothic horror story about a scientist who wished to create the “perfect” creature. One of the earliest examples of science fiction, the novel is actually a series of stories within stories that probe the mystery of nature and the elusive “principle of life.” Even if you have read Frankenstein before, it is well worth revisiting now as we ponder the scientist’s responsibility to society, and the basic need for human relationships. Available at: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/84/84-h/84-h.htm. For discussion on November 30.


SCHEDULE: There are five Book Club sessions on Mondays from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m., Room TBA

I. August 17, 2015 Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline
II. October 5, 2015 One Hundred Days: My Unexpected Journey from Doctor to Patient by David Biro
III. November 30, 2015 Frankenstein by Mary Shelley (David H. Flood, PhD, a “Frankenstein specialist” will join us)
IV. January 11, 2016 Long Day’s Journey Into Night by Eugene O’Neill
V. February 22, 2016 Short stories: “Tell Me A Riddle” (30 pages) by Tillie Olson, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” (18 pages) by Ernest Hemingway and “The Linden Tree” (16 pages) by Ella Leffland

*Limited to 10 registrants from each of the Classes of 2018 and 2019 (total 20) on a first-come basis. Students in the Classes of 2016 and 2017 are welcome even if they can attend only one or two of the sessions.

Advance registration is required. Contact Dr. Soricelli at RLSoricelli@comcast.net or (610) 892-7942. Please indicate Class and track. Come join us for the fun of reading!