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.

READINGS:

**Let the Great World Spin** (2009, 368 pages), National Book Award winner by Colum McCann. A fictionalized account of Phillipe Petit’s sensational high-wire walk between the twin towers of the World Trade Center in 1974 is the binding force between multiple first-person narratives. From the perspective of prostitutes, the brother of a monk at risk of breaking his vows, mothers grieving sons killed in the Vietnam War, a judge, and more, we experience the human ability to find meaning even in the face of great tragedy. **Recommended for summer reading before discussion on August 15, 2016.**

**Oryx and Crake** (2003, 376 pages) by Margaret Atwood. Described as “speculative fiction” rather than “science fiction” by Atwood, herself, this provocative novel focuses on a post-apocalyptic future in which a lone survivor of the human race attempts to make connection with a group of primitive human-like creatures. Issues of breakdown of the family, scientific research out of control, genetic engineering, class warfare, and much more, are raised. **Recommended for summer reading before discussion on September 28, 2016.**

**When Breath Becomes Air** (2016, 228 pages) by Paul Kalanithi. This is a profoundly moving and inspiring memoir by a young neurosurgeon, from the time of his diagnosis of terminal lung cancer at age 35 to his death 22 months later. Ultimately, without self-pity or exaggeration, Dr. Kalanithi attempts to answer the question: What makes a life worth living. **For discussion on November 28, 2016.**

From *The Doctor Stories* (1998) by Richard Selzer: “Imelda,” “Fetishes,” “Whither Thou Goest,” “Tube Feeding” and “Witness” (total 60 pages). A master physician-story-teller, Selzer is unrivaled in his ability to portray the unique connections between doctors, patients, and families. [https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Doctor_Stories.html?id=c8DeIUUOsKYC](https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Doctor_Stories.html?id=c8DeIUUOsKYC). **For discussion on January 9, 2017.**

**The Metamorphosis** (first published 1915, 54 pages) by Franz Kafka: [http://literatureproject.com/metamorphosis/index.htm](http://literatureproject.com/metamorphosis/index.htm). Time to read this again from the perspective of a medical student! A classic Literature and Medicine text. **For discussion on February 20, 2017.**

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

I. Mon. August 15, 2016  
   *Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann

II. Wed. September 28, 2016  
   *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood

III. Mon. November 28, 2016  
   *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi

IV. Mon. January 9, 2017  
   Short stories by Richard Selzer from *The Doctor Stories*

V. Mon. February 20, 2017  
   *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka

*Limited to 10 registrants from each of the Classes of 2019 and 2020 (total 20) on a first-come basis. Students in the Classes of 2017 and 2018 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!