

# Medical Humanities in Africa

## Medicine and the Humanities in Conversation

### Call for provocations

2014

You are invited to submit a proposal, abstract or summary for a ‘**provocation**’ to be presented at the Medical Humanities in Africa Conference 2014. Provocations may take many shapes: a formal academic paper, a photographic exhibition, a performance piece, a multi-media presentation, a poem or a narrative.

Building on the initial conference hosted by WiSER in 2013 entitled, ‘Body Knowledge: Medicine and Humanities in Conversation’, this conference seeks to bring together a diverse group of scholars, medical practitioners and artists working in South Africa and on the African continent. Using a format based on four streams, the conference is designed to facilitate in-depth engagement around core themes in the medical humanities, as well as to form potential research clusters. The conference will be composed of four different cross-disciplinary streams: *Paradigms*, *Pedagogies*, *Practices* and *Potential*. Each stream will be comprised of roughly equal numbers of participants who will meet together as a group for the duration of the two days. Two stream leaders will facilitate the conversations in each stream group. Conference presenters will have 5-15 minutes to present a ‘provocation’ followed by a brief discussion of the issues it raises, and a number of provocations will be clustered to contribute to a wider discussion in each stream. The conference will conclude with four separate presentations representing the experiences, dialogues, and reflections that emerged out of the thematic streams.

#### **Stream 1: ‘Paradigms’**

What are the ‘medical humanities’? *What* have they been, and *where*, and *why*? What are the medical humanities in Africa, and are they different from elsewhere? What could they be one day? What should they do? What kind of a paradigm does the ‘medical humanities’ offer for knowing about and acting in and moving through the world, for navigating suffering and joy, health and debilitation, in body, mind and spirit? This stream invites provocations on how to understand how the medical humanities have been framed, what they are and might one day become. We are interested in thinking about how this trans-disciplinary space of medical humanities might be understood as both a local project, with local actors, agendas and perspectives, as well as part of a broader global effort to bring together fields of experience and knowledge that have historically been forced apart. Provocations that consider how the medical humanities are or should be situated in an African context are especially welcome, as are provocations that address the big picture questions by starting at the ground level, in particular experiences, specific case studies, individual performances, or unique research programs.

## **Stream 2: 'Pedagogy'**

Building the medical humanities in Africa will require revising the way medicine and the humanities are introduced to undergraduate and postgraduate students. We are calling in this stream for provocations that foster imaginative pedagogies for teaching at the crossroads of medicine, the arts, and the social sciences, particularly in the African context. We invite anyone invested in rethinking the institutional structures that often prevent interdisciplinary teaching and research. Provocations that consider new approaches to teaching in the medical humanities are welcome, as are provocations that foster new ways of framing the transdisciplinary space of the medical humanities from the perspective of pedagogical shifts already underfoot globally.

## **Stream 3: 'Practice'**

What difference do the humanities make to health care practice in our context? Disciplines such as ethics, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, literature and art each bring a different perspective to health and health care. How does an inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary understanding of health and medicine affect the practice of health care in Africa? Of what direct relevance are the humanities to health professionals? How do we translate empirical and analytical results into actual changes in the way that health care is offered? We are inviting provocations in this stream that demonstrate a clear link of the humanities and the arts with the practice of health care, such as the use of the arts in medicine, alternative therapies, traditional healing and others. Submissions could include proposals, research results, and reflections on practice, or the implications of new ways of seeing on the practice of healthcare.

## **Stream 4: 'Potential' - 'The first 1,000 days'**

Please note: This stream invites provocations from a range of research interests and possibilities that deal with the question of potential. There is also special theme that addresses the First 1000 Days of Life (description below). If your proposal is specifically for that section, please identify it as such.

'The First 1000 Days' is emerging as a field of knowledge and practice. As scientific knowledge (here, the ways that maternal environment has epigenetic, partly heritable consequences) is taken up in policy and practice, we are witnessing the making of a social object with material effects. The field both synergises a range of disciplines – (epi)genetics, obstetrics, gynaecology, public health, psychology, social development, poverty studies, anthropology, art, among others – and develops new sites of humanitarian intervention, reframing current debates about 'the best interests of the child' in newly biological ways. The theme thus invites reflections on aspects of 'The First 1000 Days' from across disciplines, reflecting creatively and critically on the ways that our knowledge of reproduction shapes social forces and material practices. What are the creative possibilities of 'the first 1000 days'?

We invite prospective delegates to submit abstracts/brief summaries or descriptions of their provocations (no more than 250 words) by the **16<sup>th</sup> of May 2014** to the following address: **medhumanities2014@gmail.com**. The conference will be held near the University of Cape Town Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2014 to Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2014. Details to follow.

This conference is being organized by an interdisciplinary group of researchers from the University of Cape Town and the University of Witwaterstrand, in terms of a National Research Foundation (NRF) Knowledge Fields Development grant entitled “Medical Humanities in Africa”.

- Steve Reid, Chair of Primary Health Care, Faculty of Health Sciences, UCT
- Susan Levine, Senior Lecturer, Social Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, UCT
- Catherine Burns, Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), Wits
- Chris Colvin, Division of Social and Behavioural Sciences, School of Public Health and Family Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, UCT
- Fiona Ross, Professor, Social Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, UCT
- Kate Abney, Lecturer, Primary Health Care Directorate, Faculty of Health Sciences, UCT