

**MEDICINE & THE ARTS:
HUMANISING HEALTHCARE**
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



WEEK 1 MEDICINE & THE ARTS - THE HEART OF THE MATTER: A MATTER OF
THE HEART
WELCOME TO THE COURSE

00:00:00

Hi. My name is Susan Levine. I'm a medical anthropologist at the University of Cape Town. I have a particular interest in the medical humanities, with its emphasis on the convergence of dialogue between artists, health practitioners, and social scientists. And I'm looking forward to engaging with you in this course, Medicine and the Arts.

And I'm Steve Reid. I'm head of primary health care at UCT and a family physician, with a background in rural health. And we're here at Khayelitsha District Hospital in Cape Town to introduce this course.

Steve, what is the medical humanities for you?

So I think it's two things. Well, it's a broad interdisciplinary field. But for me, it's about what the humanities add to the practise of medicine. But at the same time, it's medicine as seen from different perspectives, literally historical, anthropological perspectives. Both of those, for me, are the components of this thing that we call the medical humanities.

What about you?

Well, Steve, you've summed it up so well. But I would say that in addition to those two, there may be a third, which has to do with teaching, with pedagogy, with the ways in which medical students are trained. With the ways in which medical students come to think about care, with mortality, and also the limits of medicine, with the limits of biomedical science.

And maybe to engage with a range of ideas which come from the arts, which come from history. And as you say, a kind of engagement. So for me, there's also a pedagogical imperative for the medical humanities to flourish.

So Susan, what led you into this field of medical humanities?

Steve, when I first arrived at the University of Cape Town and joined the Department of Anthropology, it was at the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. And at the time,

antiretrovirals were not widely available in the country. We had a quite oppositional state, a president who denied the link between HIV and AIDS. And so much of the work on the ground was taken up by documentary filmmakers, by musicians, by political activists, as well as radical health care practitioners, working really on the fringes. And it seemed to me that the medical humanities offers a very powerful space for people to cross the boundaries between disciplines to solve some of the most complex health and care issues of our times.

I always inhabited these two worlds as two separate entities. So I'm always looking for ways of integrating them, both from an intellectual point of view, but also how one incorporates the arts and different perspectives into this practise of medicine.

So we've created the space, this course, to explore important issues in life, in health, in our experience as human beings from multiple different perspectives, not just from a biomedical perspective, but also from an artistic perspective, literary perspective, a social science perspective. Because all of these ways of seeing, of being, are important. And they potentially lead us to some of the solutions to the major challenges that we face in this country and all around the world.

So Susan, give us an example of what you mean by interdisciplinarity in medical humanities, a practical example.

A practical example from my own work comes from research, very qualitative, long-term research, listening to people. And I've recently been working in KZN with childhood blindness. And particularly cataracts, which leads to childhood blindness. And finding out from parents that it's not the cost of transportation that limits their ability to get to the clinics. It's sometimes not even the accessibility of clinics for medical care.

But it's their fear. It's their fear of their children dying under anaesthesia. It's sometimes their fear of upsetting ancestors through dealing with a condition that was inherited from one child, from their parents or grandparents.

So as an anthropologist, I can elicit certain kinds of information from people that's not readily available in the health care setting by doctors. And so we've been able to make a film that focuses on one family's journey towards restoring sight in their child. So filmmakers, and anthropologists, and ophthalmologists coming together to solve a real crisis around blindness in the country.

Part of the journey of this particular course is to discover what the medical humanities means for Africa and in particular South Africa. So much theory making in medical sociology, medical anthropology, and the health sciences come from the North. And we now have an opportunity to introduce, to discover, the value of producing theory in the South.

So we've selected six critical issues to do with life. With what it means to be human or mortal. And locating these in a South African context, but hoping that you'll translate those or interpret them into your own context. We think that the interdisciplinary space is a good one to try and understand an issue in its entirety and move this field of medical humanities forward.

The starting point for this course is clearly the speakers, the presenters, the work that Steve and I did to assemble this particular course for you. But ultimately, it's about you. At some point, all of us will experience health and health care crises in our lives. And so while the course begins with our structuring, it really is an engagement between you and us.

We will lead you over the next six weeks through a series of seminars that are presented by some fascinating speakers. But we hope that you will translate those ideas into your own particular environment and situation and make sense of that through yourselves, through the assignments, and of the discussion spaces. Enjoy the journey.



2015

Susan Levine

Steve Reid

Unless otherwise stated, this material is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). This means you are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work as long as you: attribute the authors of the work; do not use the work for commercial purposes and do not remix or adapt any copies.