



Course Insights: Medical Ethics & Philosophy

Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine & Pharmacy

Alongside our well-established History of Medicine and Philosophy of Medicine courses, the Faculty also runs short courses to provide a taster of topics, allow delegates to dip into themes, or to consolidate existing interests. Having introduced a short History of Medicine course in 2009, more recently a 3 day History of Pharmacy course has been added to the programme, and this year is joined by a new 2 day Philosophy course. In this special newsletter, Maria Ferran finds out more from the course director Dr Andrew Papanikitas.

Watch this space for future Course Insights into the Faculty's History courses.

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Andrew Papanikitas

Ethics & Philosophy

Course Director



MF: Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am a part time GP in central Oxford and a part-time academic with an interest in medical education and ethics. I did both the history and philosophy courses in 1999 and 2000 and this has sparked a lifelong interest in the medical humanities. I was recruited by the previous course director whilst doing research on ethics-education in British general practice. The philosophy course is unique in terms of its breadth of lecturers and clientele, medical students learn alongside professors, some doing the course to enhance their work, others to survive their work (!) and others still as an intellectual challenge on a weekend or a retirement project. In recent years we have seen many lawyers, sociologists, historians and suitably interested non clinician non academics do the course - all are welcome subject to demonstration of interest and aptitude on the application form

MF: Share with us how you programme the courses?

The philosophy course is programmed to span western ethics and philosophy as applied to healthcare (with a heavy emphasis on medicine). The course is more seminar than lecture based and has several opportunities to develop and reflect on cases from practice and the media. We have particularly expanded the course in recent years to include some aspects of political philosophy, global ethics as well as learning-to-learn and learning-to-teach activities. In the latter category, one session is explicitly a symposium, where students have the opportunity to present work alongside past students and those on the Faculty Fellowship scheme. We also share a day with the history course, on the theme of medical ethics and human rights in the 20th century.

MF: What do you hope people will gain from taking these courses?

I hope that those who take the course will gain appreciation of the richness of western philosophy applied to medicine and the values and reasoning that underpin healthcare. Some of these they may choose to challenge, others they may choose to adopt. The short course is intended both to provide a refresher of basic concepts and a set of practically focussed sessions, such as teaching ethics and ethics in pandemics. The short course is designed to complement the main course in terms of overlapping elements of the syllabus for the DPMSA examination.

What are you working on next?

We are developing two interesting new areas for the courses. A few years ago we recorded our first podcast with Baroness Mary Warnock on the ethics and politics of IVF, and we just recently recorded a second podcast with Peter Toon on the meaning and boundaries of Illness. We also successfully trialled our first creative writing and medical ethics workshop with tutor Helen Mosby. Last year we had our first Selwyn lecture, featuring a lecture developed from the best dissertation on public vilification, and professional ethics in pathology (alliteration not intended) by former faculty president Tina Matthews. This year's Selwyn lecture promises more collegial controversy, with our shortlist examining the motives of international medical aid and critiquing policy on the treatment of transgender patients in UK healthcare institutions. More podcasts and a repeat of the course are on the horizon. After an evening of poetry in medicine with the RCGP this year there is also enthusiasm to explore literary medicine in the coming year.