

## **THE CLINICAL MORAL LABORATORY MH MINOR CAPSTONE CLASS**

### **What are the medical humanities?**

- Medical humanities is a diverse field of scholarship that may include
  - literature and poetry,
  - the visual and performing arts,
  - history of medicine,
  - and ethics,
- ...as these relate to
  - patients' illness experiences,
  - the doctor-patient relationship,
  - physician self-care

and other aspects of healthcare

### **What you do at SOM?**

- 1) Teach elective classes and course components in both the preclinical and clinical years
- 2) Supervise independent medical student research in medical humanities
- 3) Organize special events – symposia, dramatic/musical performances, public lectures, art exhibits
- 4) Faculty advisor for Plexus
- 5) My own research on medical student empathy, socialization, wellness through the arts

### **How you arrived at this position?**

By a very circuitous and unintentional route. The beginning and turning points:

- 1) My background – PhD in women's studies and counseling psychology – intention to be a feminist scholar and direct an academic women's center. That didn't come to pass
- 2) Hired at Family Focus. Realized I was more interested in the effects of illnesses of the body on the mind and spirit than I was in illnesses of the mind
- 3) Applied to Family Medicine at UC Irvine as a lark. Ended up hired. Husband spent 2 yrs commuting back and forth.
- 4) Spent about 15 years as director of behavioral science – functioned as a psychologist, but was a great opportunity to be an anthropologist on Mars, learning about physicians, patients, and medicine
- 5) Spent 5 years in administration, hating most of it; course director, clerkship director, interim chair
- 6) Personal encounter with illness led me to realize the healing power of literature
- 7) Wanted to retire – first, teach a literature and medicine elective
- 8) Rest is history: from a single course, built a program with curriculum in all 4 years of med school; research opportunities in medical humanities for 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> yr students; special events; Plexus

### **What are your hopes in developing Medical Humanities amongst med students?**

- 1) Critical thinking and curiosity – to bring a questioning gaze to accepted medical dynamics and practices
- 2) Empathy, compassion, and respect for the patient experience
- 3) Insight into the complexities and nuances of the doctor patient relationship
- 4) Self-awareness and self-reflection
- 5) Personal wellness and healing

### **What makes you hopeful?**

- 1) Medical students' boundless enthusiasm to learn anything that might make them better doctors

- 2) Realization among medical educators of the value of humanities-based approaches

**What are your ongoing and new challenges?**

- 1) Lack of substantive administrative support
- 2) Difficulties of getting humanities experts to tailor their material to the clinical and professional realities of medicine