

HUMANITIES SELECTIVES

How many of you love – really love – poetry? (Show of hands)

Despite the notable lack of true poetry lovers among you, I'm here to try to persuade you to consider signing up for one of the “medical humanities” selectives – Patient Stories/Doctor Stories or Working with Patients through the Arts.

The first thing you should know is that these selectives are not all about poetry. So you can be justifiably suspicious about the value of poetry and still get a lot out of these selectives. You do not even have to have been an English major or an art major to enjoy – and benefit from – these selectives.

In fact, instead of talking about poetry and art, we should be talking about the voice of the patient and the voice of the doctor.

Selzer story

Poems and stories offer an important window into the inner lives of patients and doctors. Of course you learn about patients by interacting with them – but as first years you aren't going to be doing that every day. Also, often patients – and doctors – can't easily articulate their deepest, most meaningful experiences directly. One place to learn about these experiences is to read the writings of patients and physicians.

PS/DS is an easy, relaxing fun class that gives you a chance in a comfortable, non-pressured environment to listen to and reflect on the nature of the patient experience and the doctor-patient relationship.

If you want an experience that is more hands on and gives you direct patient contact, please consider WPTA. This is an exciting, new selective pioneered by two second year students, Tony Hazel and Lauren Cheung. It involves learning how to use the arts to teach all sorts of patients (including kids, old people, cancer patients, and people with a range of chronic diseases) creative forms of self-expression. You don't need to know anything about creative writing or drawing or painting. You just have to have an interest in how using these media can help reveal more of the patient to you – and to the patient himself or herself.

Emily Dickinson once famously wrote: “Tell all the truth, but tell it slant.” The arts are a way of helping people release the truth within them. You want to be there when that happens.