

## OPENING REMARKS – TAMKIN

Medical humanities has been of recognized field of academic endeavor for 30 years, but many medical schools, including our own, are still struggling to define its role in student and resident training, and in continuing education for practicing physicians.

What is it precisely that we hope the study of the humanities can do for our students and for ourselves? Some of us are old-fashioned enough, or stubborn enough, to believe that at the heart of the medicine lies the patient's story. As G. Gayle Stephens, one of the founding fathers of family medicine, expressed it: (SLIDE)

At the most fundamental level, we hope that the study of literature and the arts can reconnect us in a meaningful and respectful way with our patients' stories. We hope that the study of literature and the arts can deepen empathy for our patients and remind us of the essential humanity that should always be discoverable in the doctor-patient encounter. As the nineteenth century Russian poet Kornei Chukovsky noted: (SLIDE)

William Carlos Williams wrote in an often-quoted poem: (SLIDE)  
Much of medicine and medical education is concerned these days with giving "the news" – giving a patient the "news" of a cancer diagnosis; giving students the "news" of the latest breakthrough in genetic mapping, giving residents the "news" of a new diabetes-busting drug. Poems, stories, art cannot provide this kind of news. But, as Williams suggests, only poetry can address our deepest concerns about the meaning of life and illness and suffering; only poetry can help us understand how to face death "in peace."

The purpose of this conference is to spend a day exploring how we can best integrate the humanities into our teaching and our practice, in order to become better healers for our students, our patients, and ourselves.

To begin this process, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Dr. Rita Charon.