

A Brief History of the Program for Humanities in Medicine

The Program for Humanities in Medicine was established in 1983 by Howard Spiro, who became the first director, co-director Enid Peschel, Ph.D (French literature), Priscilla Waters Norton (who served as a member of the OSS during World War II), Clara Georgiev (former president of PEN, translator, and Hillhouse High School English teacher), and associate director Mary G. McCrea Curnen, MD, MPH (a Belgian physician and author). The group was committed to the belief that the humanities were central to the practice of medicine. Their project was to be a prelude to create a context for humanities in the medical school curriculum.

In the Spiro years, the Program offered 20-22 lectures a year. The lectures took place in the Beaumont Room, where a group of regular attendees – students, faculty, and especially retired faculty – sipped sherry and munched nuts while listening to lectures on topics that touched on medicine and the humanities. For a while, some of the women who helped establish the Program served tea.

The Program offered a number of symposia which led to the creation of several books: [Facing Death](#) by Howard Spiro, Mary G. McCrea Curnen and Lee Palmer Wandel, [Doctors Afield](#) by Howard M. Spiro, Mary G. McCrea Curnen and Deborah St. James, and [Empathy and the Practice of Medicine](#) by Howard M. Spiro, Mary G. McCrea Curnen, Enid Rhodes Peschel, Deborah St. James and [Richard Selzer, MD](#).

In 2002, [Thomas P. Duffy, MD](#) became director and expanded the Program beyond the lecture series to provide writing, literature, dance, theater, and the visual arts to the medical school. During his directorship, he worked closely with [Reverend Sally Bailey](#), pioneer and founding board member of [The Global Alliance](#), and [Linda Pellico, PhD, APRN](#). Dr. Duffy strived to highlight the splendor of offerings in our environment which are a natural extension of our lives in medicine.

Dr. Duffy recruited Yale surgeon and writer Richard Selzer to teach creative writing workshops to medical students. In later years, [Lorence Gutterman, MD](#) joined Selzer, and established, along with Linda Pellico, a collaboration with the [Yale School of Nursing](#). The annual Marguerite-Rush Lerner Creative Writing Contest for medical students was incorporated into the Program during Dr. Duffy's tenure. Along with [Paul Kirwin, MD](#) and later [Richard Kravitz, MD](#), Dr. Duffy led poetry in medicine seminars for students.

Dr. Duffy created a partnership with the [Yale School of Art](#) which allowed medical students to join live figure drawing classes, and also with the medical library, where exhibition space was provided. A collaboration was established with former New York City ballerina [Emily Coates](#) who invited several medical students to join her dance troupe, and in later years the Program supported the Yale choreographers, a group of medical students who perform on the pediatrics inpatient psychiatry ward.

The Program also supported the creation of the Yale Players, a medical student theater group. With [Janice Baker](#), he helped the Healing Arts Alliance with its events and brought students into the group. With [Lynn Tanoue, MD](#), Duffy helped launch the [Yale Medical Symphony](#). And he partnered with [Susan Wheeler](#), curator of prints and drawings to create ongoing sessions for the lecture series highlighting treasures of the [Historical Medical Library](#).

The Program has benefitted immensely from the gifts provided by the Barwick endowment fund established in honor of Kenneth Barwick, a former Yale pathologist with a lifelong commitment to the humanities. Subsequent endowments have been established in the names of Howard Spiro and Thomas Duffy.

Dr. Anna Reisman assumed the leadership of the Program in the spring of 2015. Tea and sherry are long gone, but the Program is alive and well.