

Contemporary Concerns in Medicine: Birth, Life, and Death

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Course Description:

From the moment we are born to the moment we die physicians, nurses, therapists, and other healthcare workers play an important role in our health and well-being. This course will focus on the ways in which we interact with the medical field throughout the course of our lives. We will begin by exploring the purpose of healthcare and different ways of conceiving of “health” and “illness.” Then we will address bioethical questions on pregnancy and birth, such as: Why are some groups more at risk of complications during and after pregnancy? Next, we shift to the topics of healthcare funding and insurance, the clinician/patient relationship, and the experiences of marginalized communities. The course will end by considering what role the medical field should play in the dying process. The seminar will emphasize writing and journaling, and students will have the opportunity to engage directly with healthcare workers who will serve as guest speakers. This is a core course in the Health, Humanities, and Society minor.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course, you will be able to...

- Critically discuss issues around the aims of healthcare, conceptions of “health” and “illness,” pregnancy and birth, healthcare funding and insurance, the clinician/patient relationship, the experiences of marginalized communities, and the role of medicine in death and dying.
- Identify varying perspectives on a healthcare topic, and present argumentation in support of these different perspectives.
- Relate the issues discussed in class to your own experiences and reflect on the interaction between healthcare and society.

Grade Scale:

A 93%-100%	A- 90%-92.5%	B+ 87%-89.5%	B 83%-86.5%
B- 80%-82.5%	C+ 77%-79.5%	C 73%-76.5%	C- 70%-72.5%
D 60%-69.5%	F 0%-59.5%		

Point Distribution:

Paper 1	40 points
Paper 2	40 points

Interactive group presentation	40 points
Main point and question assignments (MPQs)	55 points (5 points each)
In-class work	65 points (5 points each)
Total	240 points

Papers:

There are two papers for this course. For each paper you will be asked to explain a healthcare issue in detail. Then you will consider contrasting perspectives on that issue, providing argumentation for these various perspectives. You will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit both papers incorporating my feedback. Between Papers 1 and 2 you schedule a one-on-one Writing Meeting with me in which we will talk about your ideas for Paper 2 and during that meeting we can also talk about my feedback from Paper 1. More information on the papers will be available as the due dates approach.

Interactive Group Presentation:

For this course you will work with other classmates to put together an interactive presentation that you will present sometime during the last two weeks of class. Your group will decide together on your topic and what sort of format the presentation will have. Some possibilities include a debate, a conversation, or a PowerPoint presentation. A core aspect of the presentation must present contrasting perspectives on your topic of choice. Additionally, there must be an interactive component that involves the whole class. By the eighth week of class your group will turn in a proposal that includes 1) the members of the group, 2) your topic, and 3) the format of your presentation. This proposal will not be graded. More information about the interactive group presentation will be available later in the semester.

Main Point and Question Assignments (MPQs):

Each week you write out a few sentences for each of that week's readings in which you explain what you take the main point of the reading to be. Under that you will ask a question about each reading. It is your job throughout the Tuesday and Thursday classes to get your questions answered. At the end of class on Thursdays you will turn in your MPQ, which will include the main points, questions, and answers. Each MPQ is worth 5 points. It is okay to miss one MPQ, there will be an option to make one up at the end of the semester.

In-Class Work:

On Tuesdays we will always do some sort of in-class work that you will turn in at the end of class. This might include journaling, group discussion, responding to a scenario, or something else. It is okay to miss one in-class work, there will be an option to make one up at the end of the semester.

Late Work Policy:

Papers can be turned in up to one week past the due date and will be docked 10%. After one week of being late, please discuss with me to see if it will be possible to still turn in the late work. In general, MPQs and in-class work cannot be turned in late. Additionally, it is important that you be present and participate on day your group is presenting the interactive group presentation.

Exceptional and Extreme Circumstances:

Regarding any late work or missed class, if you are having trouble turning things in on time or attending class, please talk with me. Exceptions can always be made for illness, an emergency, or some other extenuating circumstance. Talk with me about it and we will come to a solution.

Academic Misconduct:

Do not plagiarize or cheat in any way. Follow the university's policies on academic misconduct. If I discover that you have broken the university's policies on academic misconduct, I am required to report it. Punishments range from failing the assignment to expulsion from the university.

[Undergraduate Academic Code of Honor](#)

Inclusion:

It is my goal to make this class a safe space for people of all ages, races, national origins, ancestries, political affiliations, disability statuses, medical conditions, gender identities, gender expressions, sexes, sexual orientations, marital statuses, veteran statuses, and other forms of difference. No discrimination will be tolerated. Especially when participating in class discussions, everyone should make sure to be respectful. It is important to maintain a safe environment for learning to occur in. Please let me know via email if there are any inclusion-related considerations that I should be aware of (e.g., pronouns or if you use a name that is not listed in the system).

Accessibility and Accommodations:

Regarding accessibility, I will do everything I can to ensure that accommodations will be made when needed.

Any student who has a documented disability and is registered with Sara Bea Accessibility Services should speak with me as soon as possible regarding accommodations. Students who are not registered should contact the Sara Bea Accessibility Services as soon as possible since accommodation typically needs to be arranged in advance.

[Accessibility Support](#)

Mental Health:

Diminished mental health can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of mental distress might be related to your course work; if so, please speak with me. However, problems with other parts of your life can also contribute to decreased academic performance. The University Counseling Center (UCC) provides cost-free and confidential mental health services to help you manage personal challenges that threaten your emotional or academic well-being.

Remember, getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do — for yourself and for those who care about you. For more resources, please see ucc.nd.edu or studenthealth.nd.edu.

The UCC is located on the third floor of Saint Liam Hall Phone: 574-631-7336. Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30am – 5:00pm.

24/7 crisis intervention services are available by calling the UCC at 574-631-7336. Crisis Services are available 24/7 except during the week that the University is closed over the Christmas holiday. <https://ucc.nd.edu/counseling-services/crisis/>

Title IX:

The University of Notre Dame provides services for those who have been affected by sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating or domestic violence, stalking and any conduct that creates a hostile environment. For help and further information including contact information for on and off-campus resources, please consult <https://titleix.nd.edu/support-resources>.

Other Helpful Resources:

[Writing Center](#)

[University Health Services](#)

[LGBTQ Resources](#)

Communication:

The best way to communicate with me is email. I am usually able to respond to an email within 48 hours. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns you have. I will hold office hours on Tuesdays from 3:30pm-4:30pm in 219C O'Shaughnessy Hall. I am also available to schedule meetings outside of my office hours.

Technology Policy:

You are permitted to use a laptop, tablet, or other electronic device for notetaking in class. However, I do ask that when you are in class, you focus on what is being discussed and not browse the web or do anything else non-class related on your device. I understand that you may need to contact someone during class, but I ask that you please leave the room to call or text.

Difficult Content:

Some topics we discuss could be potentially triggering or upsetting. If there is something that you think would be difficult for you to read or view, then it is okay to skip it. Just let me know that you need to skip it and we will decide on something else you can read instead. If a particular reading, video, or class discussion seems like it would be potentially triggering or upsetting, I will do my best to warn you ahead of time. If you have any thoughts or questions about any of this please feel free to reach out to me.

Please Note:

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus. If I do so, I will always give you notice ahead of time.


Schedule:

Date and Topic	Readings and Assignments
<i>What is health and illness?</i>	
Tuesday August 22	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syllabus
Thursday August 24	No class—Dr. Evans is getting married!
Tuesday August 29	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Callahan (1999) “Remembering the Goals of Medicine”• Ereshefsky (2007) “Defining ‘health’ and ‘disease’” Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-class work 1
Thursday August 31	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Valles (2018) “Health as a Life Course Trajectory of Complete Well-Being in Social Contexts” Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• MPQ 1
<i>Reproduction, pregnancy, and birth</i>	
Tuesday September 5	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Almeling (2015) “Reproduction”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brubaker & Dillaway (2009) “Medicalization, Natural Childbirth, and Birthing Experiences” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 2
Thursday September 7	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declercq & Zephyrin (2020) “Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Primer” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 2
Tuesday September 12	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millhiser (2022) “The End of Roe v. Wade, Explained” from Vox • Dirks (2022) “Criminalization of Pregnancy Has Already Been Happening to the Poor and Women of Color” from NPR <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 3
Thursday September 14	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooper Owens (2019) “Black Maternal and Infant Health: Historical Legacies of Slavery” • Clark (2022) “Biden Administration Releases Badly Needed Maternal Mortality Strategy as Dobbs Decision Could Worsen Crisis” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 3
<i>Health insurance and funding</i>	
Tuesday September 19	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonwealth Fund (2020) “International Health Care System Profiles: United States” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 4
Thursday September 21	<p>Read:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quadagno (2004) “Why the United States Has No National Health Insurance: Stakeholder Mobilization Against the Welfare State, 1945-1996” • Gawande (2017) “The Heroism of Incremental Care” from The New Yorker <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 4
Tuesday September 26	<p>Guest speaker: Dr. Elizabeth Lanphier discussing trauma-informed care</p> <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 5
Thursday September 28	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumbold (2017) “Universal Health Coverage, Priority Setting, and the Human Right to Health” • Goldstein & Bowers (2015) “The Patient as Consumer- Empowerment or Commodification?” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 5 • Paper 1
<i>The clinician-patient relationship</i>	
Tuesday October 3	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nyquist Potter (2019) “Voice, Silencing, and Listening Well: Socially Located Patients, Oppressive Structures, and an Invitation to Shift the Epistemic Terrain” • Neumann (2009) “Analyzing the ‘Nature’ and ‘Specific Effectiveness’ of Clinical Empathy: A Theoretical Overview and Contribution Towards a Theory-Based Research Agenda” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 6 • Start setting up Writing Meetings
Thursday October 5	<p>Read:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaba & Sooriakumaran (2007) “The Evolution of the Doctor-Patient Relationship” • Entwistle et al. (2010) “Supporting Patient Autonomy: The Importance of Clinician-Patient Relationships” • Back et al. (2009) “Compassionate Silence in the Patient–Clinician Encounter: A Contemplative Approach” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 6
<i>Experiences of marginalized communities</i>	
Tuesday October 10	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bailey et al. (2021) “How Structural Racism Works—Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities” • Yearby (2021) “Race Based Medicine, Colorblind Disease—How Racism in Medicine Harms Us All” • Amutah et al. (2021) “Misrepresenting Race—The Role of Medical Schools in Propagating Physician Bias” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 7
Thursday October 12	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hoffman et al. (2016) “Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs About Biological Differences Between Blacks and Whites • Cineas (2021) “Race Norming’ and the Long Legacy of Medical Racism” from Vox <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 7
Tuesday October 17	Mid-term break
Thursday October 19	Mid-term break
Tuesday October 24	Read:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richie (2019) “Not Sick- Liberal, Trans, and Crip Feminist Critiques of Medicalization” • Johnson (2019) “Rejecting, Reframing, and Reintroducing- Trans People’s Strategic Engagement With the Medicalisation of Gender Dysphoria” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 8
Thursday October 26	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davis et al. (2016) “Giving Sex: Deconstructing Intersex and Trans Medicalization Practices” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 8 • Last day for Writing Meetings • Turn in interactive group presentation proposal
<i>Death and dying</i>	
Tuesday October 31 	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 1 “The Independent Self” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 9
Thursday November 2	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 2 “Things Fall Apart” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 9 • Paper 2
Tuesday November 7	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 3 “Dependence” and Chapter 4 “Assistance”

	<p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 10
Thursday November 9	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 5 “A Better Life” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 10
Tuesday November 14	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 6 “Letting Go” and Chapter 7 “Hard Conversations” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 11
Thursday November 16	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawande <i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Chapter 8 “Courage” <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPQ 11
Tuesday November 21	Thanksgiving holiday
Thursday November 23	Thanksgiving holiday
<i>Interactive group presentations</i>	
Tuesday November 28	Interactive group presentations
Thursday November 30	<p>Interactive group presentations</p> <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 12 • Revisions of Papers 1 & 2 (optional)
Tuesday December 5	Interactive group presentations
Thursday December 7	<p>Interactive group presentations</p> <p>Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work 13 • Make-up MPQ (optional)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make-up in-class work (optional)
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