The Centre for Medical Humanities: projects and mode of practice

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Welcome to the Centre for Medical Humanities

The Durham Centre for Medical Humanities (CMH) conducts and champions world-leading research in the field of the medical humanities. Our aim is to open up routes for a two-way exchange between clinical practice and research, on the one hand, and humanistic modes of inquiry, on the other. We do this in the hope that these exchanges will be mutually enlightening and transformative. Our vision is to produce outstanding research in the medical humanities that will open up discussion across scholarly, practice-based and policy contexts. This is enabled through an active community of postgraduates, a University wide network of affiliate academics and a vibrant programme of seminars, public engagement events, and visiting fellows. 

Read more on the field of Medical Humanities.
View our Prezi

What is it like to hear voices?

What cognitive and neural mechanisms are involved when someone is hearing voices?

How has voice-hearing been interpreted and represented in different cultures, religions and historical periods?

How can we improve clinical practice in cases where people find their voices distressing?

Inner Ear illustrations by Mary Robson 2013
Core Group

Hubbub is an international team of scientists, humanists, artists, clinicians, public health experts, broadcasters and public engagement professionals. We explore the dynamics of rest, noise, tumult, activity and work, as they operate in mental health, neuroscience, the arts and the everyday. We are based in London as the first residents of The Hub at Wellcome Collection from October 2014 to July 2016.

Read more...

Felicity Callard (group leader)

I am an interdisciplinary researcher who also engages with policy and advocacy in relation to mental health.

Charles Ferynhough

I am a research psychologist and writer of fiction and non-fiction.

Claudia Hammond

Daniel Margulies

James Wilkes
CMH New Generations Programme

Interdisciplinary skills development for medical humanities: an opportunity for early career researchers and postgraduates. Funded by the AHRC and led by Durham University’s Centre for Medical Humanities in collaboration with the Northern Network for Medical Humanities Research and the Wellcome Trust.

Medical Humanities is a dynamic field that critically engages with ideas, practices, policies and evidence relating to health, wellbeing, illness and disease. As such it embraces a wide disciplinary range of influences including those from the humanities, social science and science. The field has grown substantially over the last decade in the context of the increasing importance of interdisciplinary working, and with the help of support from funding agencies such as the Wellcome Trust, the AHRC and ESRC. Emerging humanities researchers are increasingly engaging with interdisciplinary research but lack contexts in which to learn about and experience how it is done.

Durham University’s Centre for Medical Humanities, in collaboration with the Northern Network for Medical Humanities Research and the Wellcome Trust has set up the New Generations Programme to address this issue. Supported by a Collaborative Skills Development grant from the AHRC, this unique programme aims to deliver an exciting and innovative skills development package to a group of doctoral students and early career researchers in the medical humanities while facilitating the development of a supportive, interdisciplinary peer group. Additionally, the programme will create career development opportunities by enabling interaction between participants and staff in key centres of the medical humanities while engaging in discussions on the full range of medical humanities career options.

The programme is intended to enhance research skills and give participants the opportunity to experience high quality public engagement.
About

This project proposes that breathing and breathlessness can only be understood fully by drawing not only on physiological and pathological information, but also on cultural, historical and phenomenological sources. We propose to extend medical humanities work by incorporating cross-cultural literary, historical, philosophical, and empirical research into the medical understanding of breathlessness. The research will further knowledge of this common symptom, and will inform medical approaches to preventing and treating diseases for which breathlessness is the primary symptom. Our major clinical focus will be chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), soon to be the third leading cause of death worldwide. The key goal of the project is to use medical humanities research outcomes to inform medical interventions in diseases in which breathlessness is a symptom. The project has two main phases: to study breathlessness from a variety of medical humanities perspectives; and to use the outcomes to inform and improve clinical practice.

Meet the team

Areas of focus

- The cultural life of breath
- Medical history of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
- Phenomenological perspectives: the lived experience of breathing
- Breathlessness in the clinic
- Impact of medical humanities on clinical practice

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Medical humanities
Philosophy
Literary/cultural studies/history
Medical history
Medical anthropology
Respiratory neuroscientist and clinician
Patient representation
Primary care research
Design and workflow expert

Expert facilitator
‘Feels like there isn’t enough air in the air..’

Breathe Easy Group Member
Challenges of ‘entanglement’

• Balancing complexity and simplicity
• Power of ‘critical’ disciplines
• Power of ‘expert’ knowledge
• Tackling ‘epistemic injustice’
“... intervene more explicitly in ontological questions – in particular aetiology, pathogenesis, intervention and cure – rather than.. leaving such questions largely to the domains of the life sciences and biomedicine.”

“..a framework in which the ‘perspectives’ of the humanities and pitted against those of the ‘sciences’ or ‘social sciences’ might give way to a much richer and more entangled investigation of bio-psycho-social-physical events that underpin the life, and death, of any organism.”

Viney, Callard and Woods, 2015
The Future?
The Wellcome Centre for Medical Humanities

- International research hub for methodological innovation and collaboration
- Research staff
- Doctoral programme
- Administrative team
- Staff and research leadership development
- Public engagement
- Co-location
Proposed draft themes

Mind, memory, affect
- memory, trauma, PTSD

Body, breath, environment
- Resources for living: air, water, food

Rest, activity, work, wellbeing
- humour, leisure, creativity

Time and place, stability and scale
- precarity, mobility, refuge

Experiment, entanglement, interdisciplinarity
- Creative practice and interdisciplinarity