



CFP—11th International Conference on Poetry and Medicine and 2020 Hippocrates Awards

Historical Building | University of Oviedo | May 15, 2020

In her celebrated essay 'On Being Ill' Virginia Woolf contended that the English language, though rich in adjectives to explain emotional distress, 'at once runs dry' when it comes to describing illness and physical pain. Her argument about the inaccuracy of language to deal with health-related issues has been further developed by philosopher Elaine Scarry, among others, who maintains that the 'unshareability' of physical pain, i.e., its 'resistance to language' is a plausible explanation for its generalised absence from socio-cultural representations. However, it has been argued that poetry—with its employment of rhetorical strategies like metaphorisation, simile, alliteration, anaphora, and the breaking of the line—is particularly well equipped to talk about illness and physical infirmity and provides a language where there seemed to be none.

There is now a solid body of work on medical poetry, i.e., poetry that deals with medical issues. *Anthologies like The Poetry Cure* (eds. Julia Darling and Cynthia Fuller, 2004), *Signs and Humours* (ed. Lavinia Greenlaw, 2007), *Poetry in Medicine* (ed. Michael Salcman, 2015), and *Illness as Inspiration* (ed. Theodore Dalrymple, 2019), to mention but a few, prove that poetry is well suited to compensate for the inability of literal language to deal with pain. Though these anthologies are all quite recent, the poems included span several centuries and showcase the socio-cultural dimension of pathologies across time. All in all, poetry is now generally perceived as a valuable vehicle to express pain and to connect us with the experience of illness by means of its figurative language and conceptual strategies. However, and in spite of growing initiatives to incorporate poetry as a therapeutic tool in different medical areas, comparatively little research has been done on the curative and/or healing power of poetry for patients in a clinical context.

We invite proposals for talks, discussion panels, poster sessions and poetry readings that address the interaction between Poetry and Medicine from either literary or scientific perspectives, and from any historical or contemporary period. Bearing in mind that our conference is eminently interdisciplinary, cross-fertilisation between the Humanities and the Sciences is particularly welcome. Topics may include, but are not restricted to:

- The exploration of diverse pathologies through poetic language
- The pathologies of extinction (ecological grief and trauma) in poetic discourse
- Illness in crisis areas: beyond war metaphors?
- Gender issues in medical poetry
- Poetry as therapy: its potential and its limitations
- Poetry in the education and training of health professionals
- Poetry as an aid to health professionals
- The place of poetry within the Medical Humanities
- The translation of medical poetry
- The doctor's perspective, the patient's perspective: gaps and bridges

Confirmed poets and speakers

Andrew Dimitri
Fouad M. Fouad
Lawrence Sail

Please submit abstracts of up to 400 words (and up to 5 references, if appropriate) to the Hippocrates Initiative for Poetry and Medicine website www.hippocrates-poetry.org (section: Poetry and Medicine Events) by **15 March** (for oral presentations) and **15 April** (for poster presentations). Authors will be notified one week after submission deadline.

The 11th annual International Conference on Poetry and Medicine is being held as a partnership between the Hippocrates Initiative for Poetry and Medicine and the University of Oviedo, and will include the 2020 Hippocrates Award ceremony. A pre-conference programme of poetry readings and performance will take place on May 14. Information on pre-conference events, academic programme and accommodation will be available shortly on the Hippocrates Initiative website.

*Please direct enquires to luzmar@uniovi.es
Information on the Hippocrates Awards at hippocrates.poetry@gmail.com*



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