**Center for Uses of Literature**

Leader:

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**Narrative Medicine: Humanities, the Arts, and Medicine**

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Anette Søgaard Nielsen, professor, Clinical Institute

MD, Merethe K. Andersen, associate professor, Department of Public Health

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**Program**

By “narrative medicine” we mean health care practiced with narrative skills of recognizing, absorbing, interpreting, and being moved by the stories of illness. The field is defined by Dr. Rita Charon, Columbia University, and established at SDU since 2017. Narrative medicine aims for a deep integration of humanities (including psychology, anthropology and social science) and the arts in medical and healthcare education as well as research interventions. This cross-disciplinary field is committed to the realization that a portion of the evidence in evidence-based medicine will be found not in numbers but in language and stories. Generally biomedical sciences are interested in the generalities, whereas narrative medicine privileges particular individual narratives and attends to the meaning that the singular storyteller develops. A narrative competence for health professionals – and narrative empowerment for patients/relatives/citizens – can be built through facilitated training in reading of literary texts and writing of participants’ own stories.

Narrative medicine in education and interventions at SDU is closely related to Rita Felski's idea of literature as an instrument to reflect, and enhance the importance of, modes of existence like recognition, identification, enchantment, knowledge, etc. We challenge the dominant, traditional ideology that literary studies should never be instrumentalized, and that art ought to be studied only for its own purpose. Rita Felski has been an important voice in recent years, provoking scholars in the old humanities by arguing that recognition and even identification are important aspects of reading also on an academic level. We do not believe that our view on literature would be simplified if we spoke more freely of how reading and writing could benefit the singular person in education across faculties and in the society at large.

Narrative medicine as a truly interdisciplinary field demands that the health sciences become more open to qualitative research and respect it as a method of equal value*—*and that literary studies acknowledge the many potential health-related uses of literature in terms of well-being, empathy, growth, social inclusion, meaning of life etc. “Treating the whole person” is an approach gaining more and more traction in medicine, and narrative medicine is one way to reach that goal. At the same time, we are looking for new ways to establish a “criticism for the whole person” in literary studies.

**Activities, 2022**

* Online workshop with Josie Billington, March 16, 13-15, “Narrative medicine in intervention research, potentials and pitfalls”. JB is professor in English literature at University of Liverpool and part of Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society. (Language: English)
* Online webinar with Christian Graugaard, Apr 6, 15-16. “Lægevidenskab og poesi”. Presentation of the new anthology *Enhver sygdom er en fortælling*. CG is physician and professor of sexology at University of Aalborg. (Language: Danish)
* Online webinar with Katarina Bernhardsson, June 2, 15-16. Presentation of and Q&A about the new Birgit Rausing Center for Medical Humanities at University of Lund. KB is associate professor of medical humanities and co-leader of the new Center at University of Lund. (Language: Nordic)
* Conference: “Skriv dig selv. Narrativ medicin i en bedre psykiatri”, Oct 13, 9-16. (Language: Danish)
* Online webinar with Anita Wohlmann, Nov?, 15-16. Lecture on and Q&A about her new book at Edinburgh University Press on metaphors in health communication. (Language: English)
* Online webinar with Arthur Frank, Dec?, 15-16. Lecture on and Q&A about his new book at Oxford University Press on vulnerable reading of Shakespeare’s dramas with patients. AF is professor emeritus at University of Calgary. (Language: English)