Description:
This mini-elective will be structured like a book discussion group, meeting in the evening once a month over tea, coffee and desserts to discuss literature. Every text, every word we read or hear carries meaning because of all the other contexts and situations in which we've heard those same words before. This richly interconnected web of stories, words, phrases, and texts is the way our culture helps us to interpret and "imagine" our particular experiences in the world around us. This course will use many different kinds of culturally relevant literature (drama, poetry, children's literature, popular fiction, classics) to help us explore the ways our culture imagines and interprets the experience of medicine. Our goal is to understand better how our own words in the office may echo the "divine healer", the "mad scientist," the "charlatan" or other mythological healers in our patients' ears—so that we can consciously communicate more effectively with patients.

There will be four class meetings for two hours each. Each session will be conducted in a small group discussion format.

Students are expected to complete readings prior to the course sessions (20 – 80 pages of fiction, poetry or drama), reflect in writing on the week's readings (approximately 1 page each week except the first class meeting) and come prepared for vigorous discussion. For the final class session, students will be given the opportunity to suggest other culturally relevant texts for the class to consider.

READING LIST PLAN TBD.

Objectives:
- To gain an appreciation for the various parts physicians play in the literature of our culture.
- To learn to use the tools and systems of literary criticism to analyze literature, and then in turn to analyze the "text" of a clinical medical encounter.
- To gain an appreciation for the complex ways in which our own words and actions may be interpreted and misinterpreted within the clinical setting by patients who listen to us with ears and minds which have been prepared for the encounter by the literature, myths and stories of our culture.
Course Outline

Medicine and Literature

Course Director:
Robin Maier, MD
maierm@upmc.edu

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Location:
All sessions
Maier home on Forbes Avenue near Beechwood Blvd. in Squirrel Hill.

Requirements:
- Actively participate in all four sessions.
- Complete reading assignments before each session, (20 – 80 pages of fiction, poetry or drama).
- Reflect in writing on the week’s readings (approx. 1 page each week except the first class meeting) and come prepared for vigorous discussion.