

Moral Moments in Medicine: Epidemics, Disparities, and History Module 2020-21

Faculty:

Jeffrey P. Baker MD, PhD, Jeffrey.baker@duke.edu

Rosalinda Canizares, PT, DPT, Rosalinda.canizares@duke.edu

Brett McCarty, ThD, brett.mccarty@duke.edu

Overview:

How a society confronts an epidemic tells us much about its priorities, beliefs, and social tensions. Each month we will take a close look at some of the most famous infectious disease outbreaks of the past two centuries, ranging from smallpox and yellow fever to the 1918 influenza, polio, and HIV. In each case, we'll ask what groups bore the greatest losses, and why? How do epidemics raise questions of who belongs to a society, and who is the "other"? How did racism play out through institutions, policies, and even scientific knowledge? How did racist assumptions intersect with other categories such as gender, class, and sexual orientation? We'll examine these questions through a variety of engaging sources, including first-hand accounts, pictures and film clips, with the ultimate goal of better understanding the still unfolding history of COVID-19.

Objectives:

- 1) Understand how the categories of race and "whiteness" best understood not as biological categories but social constructions that are the products of history
- 2) Discuss historical case examples of past pandemics illustrating how racism has shaped health disparities through cultural assumptions and social structures
- 3) Understand how this history informs our understanding of disparities unmasked by COVID-19

Schedule: We will plan on meeting for one-hour once a month on Thursdays, October through June. All meetings by zoom in Fall 2020; we will follow Duke guidelines after that point. We'll start at 8 pm.

Big Picture: This small group is the main component of the Moral Moments in Medicine elective, providing 1.5 hours credit per session for total of 12-14 hours. The remaining of the 20 required hours will come from other activities still yet to be planned (Book clubs, Movie Nights, Story Circles, Med Humanities Lectures—details will be Canvas.)

Website: Course management system is Canvas (<https://dukemed.instructure.com/>).

The Moral Moments in Medicine site is still being constructed, but will list our class separately as one of the modules. Once I finalize the schedule, I will post the monthly dates, topics, readings and resources.

Expectations: Students are expected to attend, participate, and complete the advance reading/resource. We want to encourage a space where we feel safe challenging each other and ourselves in a respectful way. Attendance will be taken; up to two absences are allowed if students submit a written reflection on the reading (due within one week of the missed class). Unexpected absences will be handled individually.

Schedule and Assignments:

All classes will take place 8-9 pm on the dates below, by zoom (unless Duke policy changes). Readings and a reading guide will be posted on Canvas following the previous class. It is possible that we may change topics for some of the later sessions depending on student interest.

- 1) Introduction (Sept 24)
- 2) Made in the USA: Thomas Jefferson and the Construction of Race (Oct 22)
- 3) Explaining Racial Immunity (Nov 12)
- 4) Typhoid Mary: Immigrants, Public Health, and Civil Liberties (Jan 21)
- 5) The Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Feb 18)
- 6) Epidemics and the US-Mexican Border (March 18)
- 7) The Politics of Polarization: HIV in the United States (April 18)
- 8) The Cocaine and Opiate Epidemics (May 20)
- 9) 21st Century Emerging Diseases, Race, and Xenophobia (June 10)

Discussion Guidelines

Because this course engages some of the fundamental questions of our lives, please approach our discussions together with the following in mind:

1. Please be respectful and gentle with one another.
2. Focus first on listening well and then on responding constructively.
3. We are all seeking to learn and grow, so let's help one another in that work. Oftentimes this may mean we need to challenge one another. At other times we may need to avoid focusing on a surface-level disagreement because something more important is at work under the surface of a conversation. Learning the difference is lifelong work.