At the June Evening Ethics program facilitated by Teneille Brown, “Perverse Incentives in Care: Exploring the ways Medicare reimbursement creates injustice or maleficence,” I made a comment involving the interface of pharmaceuticals and economics. This brief note is meant to give slightly more context to the comment. Economics, in some form, has been with us since the dawn of history. Perhaps, an example many millennia ago – a negotiated exchange of two “never fail” quartz “flint” rocks (a must have), for two “easy payments” of expertly rounded sling stones and a satchel of healing roots and herbs. Economics, as a formal science has been available for at least 300–400 years. It has matured and become valuable in predicting many human behaviors. Very recently, society has experienced much uncertainty with the economics of pharmaceuticals. Media reports highlight and imply greed in the financial disclosures of pharmaceutical companies, and the public are easily led to conclude truth in the reports. Nonetheless, there are strong arguments that greed exists in pharmaceutical markets. Companies such as Turing Pharmaceuticals (owned by Martin Shkreli) and KV Pharmaceuticals are under scrutiny for their pricing practices. Also, reimbursement for compounded medications for pain therapies have received attention through government medical claims auditing. Unquestionably, there is human suffering that results from high-priced pharmaceuticals and limited access to many medications. This is a fundamental issue in the area of justice and resource allocation. In the book, “Ethics and the Pharmaceutical Industry,” Michael Santoro writes,

“The pharmaceutical industry has attracted vast sums of private investment and it has employed these funds to invent and bring to market a wide array of life-saving and useful drugs. The problem with the market, however, is that it does not perfectly correspond to human medical needs. The market responds to consumer demand, which reflects wealth and ability to pay. Human medical needs, however, exist even where consumer markets don’t.”

The science of “pharmacoeconomics,” a relatively new discipline, offers much insight for evaluating these types of questions. First introduced in the early 1990s, over the past 15 years it has become more widely acknowledged as a tool for health technology assessment (HTA) involving pharmaceutical therapies. Many Colleges of Pharmacy have created pharmacoeconomics departments or divisions. In addition, numerous corporate entities in the industry have dedicated pharmacoeconomists with expert training in health care, economics, statistics, and in some circumstances, public policy. Pharmacoeconomists examine pharmaceuticals using many types of models, including cost-benefit, cost-effectiveness, cost-utility, and others. Frequently, the effects of a pharmaceutical are analyzed in terms of its quality-adjusted-life-year (“QALY”; pronounced as, “kwah-le”). There are many sources for further information on this discipline. The International Society For Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) is a professional organization dedicated to this science. Their website is a valuable resource for more information: www.ISPOR.org. Also, both the University of Utah College of Pharmacy and Intermountain Health Care have specialized divisions dedicated to pharmacoeconomics. While the field is still relatively young, it is becoming an essential tool to help guide public policy in resource allocation. As health care technologies continue to evolve, there will be even greater dependence on the valuable analytical capabilities created through pharmacoeconomics and health technology assessment.

Opportunities to Engage in Medical Ethics and Humanities Through Reading and Writing
By Susan Sample, PhD, MFA

Word is getting out about the many narrative-related events and activities supported by the Division of Medical Ethics and Humanities. Increasingly, medical students, physicians, and health sciences staff are creating original writing and appreciating the unique contributions literary writing makes to the practice of medicine and the well-being of professionals and patients alike.

THE SCOPE, the University of Utah's health sciences radio station, will air a feature on selected activities this fall. Included will be interviews with campus authors who participated in the inaugural Art Aloud, a spoken word art café DMEH co-sponsored last April with UUHS Office of Health Equity and Inclusion, Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library, Huntsman Cancer Institute Wellness, SOM Graduate Medical Education Wellness, and UUHS Wellness Office. A second Art Aloud will be held September 14, noon, Garden Level, Eccles Health Sciences Library, and will offer writers and audiences the opportunity to experience "the electric energy that comes from sharing original work," says Ana Maria Lopez, M.D., Associate Vice President Health Equity and Inclusion. For more information, call 801-585-1934 or healthequity@hsc.utah.edu.

Original writing and artwork are beautifully presented in print in the just-released 2016 issue of Rubor: Reflections on Medicine from the Wasatch Front. The student-run literary journal is sponsored by the University of Utah School of Medical Alumni Association and the DMEH, whose medical humanities faculty serve as advisors. Martin de la Pressa, MS 2016, served as editor-in-chief of issue 4; Gretchen Case, Ph.D., was faculty advisor. Contact Gretchen Case at Gretchen.case@hsc.utah.edu for hard copies of Issue 4, check at the Eccles Library. Issue 4 will also be posted soon at http://rubor.med.utah.edu/volumes.

Two new writing groups available to healthcare professionals and students were formed this past year under the direction of Susan Sample, Ph.D., M.F.A. Both groups offer participants time to write, share works-in-progress, and learn new writing strategies. The Resident Writing Group meets one evening every month in the Cartwright Conference Room, (times to be determined), and welcomes medical students, faculty, and staff as well as resident physicians. One resident just completed a memoir of his experiences in Bangladesh, while another recently submitted a collection of poems to the Utah Arts Council's annual writing competition. The Physician-Staff Writing Group meets during lunch at Huntsman Cancer Hospital the first Friday of every month. For more information about participating in either of these writing groups, contact Susan Sample at Susan.Sample@hsc.utah.edu

Two medical school courses now incorporate reflective writing. In Layers of Medicine, a required course developed and co-taught by Gretchen Case, Ph.D., and Karly Pippett, M.D., first-year students complete short writing assignments, several of which have been published. This summer, Daniela Rose Anderson, MS 2018, published The Moon Prince and The Sea (Et Alia Press). With delicate watercolor illustrations and poignant prose, Anderson tells a true story about two children in different countries undergoing treatment for terminal illnesses. Proceeds from the picture book will help fund medical care for children. Third- and fourth-year students have the opportunity to develop and refine their skills in Writing the Doctor-Patient Relationship, a reflective writing elective taught by Susan Sample. Student-authors from this course along with those in two medical humanities electives taught by Gretchen Case, Imagining Medicine and Medicine in Art, regularly exhibit their work at the Dean's Reception prior to commencement.

Lastly, the Physicians Literature and Medicine Discussion Group meets 2nd Wednesdays of each month, 6pm -8pm, at the University of Utah Hospital large conference room, to discuss a selected reading together over dinner provided by the office of Tom Miller, MD, CMO UUHospital. For more than 25 years, narrative has served as an effective springboard to explore ethical issues in health care in these CME accredited sessions where health-care professionals and their friends throughout the community discuss literature. Newcomers, especially medical students, residents, and practicing clinicians interested in the books are encouraged to attend. See the DMEH website for details and scheduled readings. If you’d like to be added to our email invitation list, please contact Linda Carr-Lee Faix at linda.carrlee@hsc.utah.edu.
In collaboration with the Eccles Health Sciences Library

“Melancholia Revisited: Humoral Psychology in Shakespeare’s Plays”
with Mark Matheson, D. Phil
Tuesday, August 30, 5:30pm-7:00pm
Eccles Health Sciences Library, History of Medicine Room (upper level)
CME and Light Refreshments

How do we understand human character? Do we still think of individuals as representative of a “type”? What are our explanations for mental illness? How do our answers to these questions affect our human relationships and professional practice?

This ethics discussion will coincide with a National Library of Medicine exhibit at the Eccles Health Sciences Library called “And There’s the Humor of It: Shakespeare and the Four Humors.” It’s curated by Joan Gregory, and it will be available for us to visit. Shakespeare and his Renaissance contemporaries inherited humoral psychology from the classical period, and it served as an explanatory system for human character and conduct. The residues of this system remain in our language today, as when we speak of a certain person as “melancholy,” “sanguine,” or “phlegmatic.” Shakespeare also had other means of understanding individual character and mental illness, and we’ll discuss some of these at our gathering. Mark Matheson, D. Phil, writes, “I look forward to hearing your evaluations of humoral psychology from the perspective of modern medicine—and your thoughts on whether some of the assumptions underlying this system (though not the system itself) remain active today.” (There is no background reading for this session.)

Evening Ethics

“Gallows Humor: Laughing When It’s Not Funny (Or Is It)?”
Facilitated by Gretchen Case, PhD and Phil Baese, MD
Tuesday, September 20, 2016
5:30pm-7:00pm
Research Administration Building, 1st floor Large Conference Room
CME and light refreshments

Why would anyone find the gallows funny? This brand of humor—joking in the face of death, danger, fear, hopelessness—is common in medical settings. During this Evening Ethics, we will discuss why we laugh at un-funny moments, reflect on how and when such joking is appropriate, and think through some of our own experiences with gallows humor in medicine along with recent examples that have garnered widespread attention. Background reading for this session is “Gallows Humor in Medicine” by Katie Watson. (Hastings Center Report, 41, No. 5, (2011), p 37-45)

Evening Ethics

October Evening Ethics:
“What do you do when you are being recorded?”
Watch for more details, soon!
Physicians Literature and Medicine Discussion Group

August 10, 2016
University of Utah Hospital Large Conference Room #W1220 6:00-8:30p, Facilitated by Gretchen Case, PhD

The Center Cannot Hold by Elyn Saks

In The Center Cannot Hold, Elyn Saks eloquently describes schizophrenia from the perspective of someone who has actually lived with its varying manifestations. Saks brings impressive scholarship in the areas of law and psychoanalysis to bear on her own life experiences, elevating this book from simply a well-written memoir to a compelling study of what it means to be mentally ill, and how institutions and laws created to help people just as often limit and stigmatize them. Saks’ writing urges the reader to reconsider many assumptions about schizophrenia and its treatment and to think deeply about ingrained concepts like normal, successful, or stable.

September 14, 2016
University of Utah Hospital Large Conference Room #W1220 6:00-8:30p, Facilitated by Rachel Borup, PhD.

On the Move: A Life by Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks has been called “the poet laureate of medicine” and “the bard of brain disorders.” Not an uncontroversial figure, he is one of the pioneers in narrative medicine, or the idea that listening to patients’ unique stories is a key part of diagnosing and treating their diseases. In his 2015 memoir, On the Move: A Life, the neurologist who famously found his patients’ compulsions so fascinating turns his analytic gaze on himself, examining, among other things, his early obsession with motorcycles and weight lifting, his experimentation and addiction to drugs, and his struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality and find intimate companionship. Sacks died in 2015 and many call this last book his most revealing.

October 12, 2016
University of Utah Hospital Large Conference Room #W1220 6:00-8:30p, Facilitated by Susan Sample, MFA, PhD

Your Face in Mine: A Novel by Jess Row

Plastic surgery has "a racial or ethnic component," according to Jess Row, whose provocative and acclaimed novel, Your Face in Mine, could be read as a support for his claim. The book begins when Kelly Thorndike, a scholar who returns to his hometown of Baltimore after the death of his Chinese wife and their daughter in a car accident, happens to encounter a man who looks eerily familiar. Only when the man addresses him does Kelly realize that the stranger was one of his closest friends: Martin Lipkin, then a white Jewish teen who played in their punk trio. Now he is Martin Wilkinson, a community leader and businessman, and he is black. After suffering psychologically most of life from "racial dysphoria," Martin underwent racial reassignment surgery in Bangkok; even his wife, a black attorney, is unaware of his past. Martin's revelation launches the novel into a fascinating exploration of identity, race, and culture. It focuses less on "passing" than on the impact others' identity has on our own personal history and sense of self. Additionally, the novel raises ethical questions surrounding medicine, including the ends of plastic surgery. As the author is quoted, "I wanted people to ask, 'If I could have the surgery, would I?'"
What it means to be human has been in dramatic evolution over recent decades, and nowhere is the nature of the human more in flux or more at risk than in medicine. In this talk, Dr. Brown, director of the Center for Humanizing Critical Care at Intermountain Medical Center, discusses humanization and dehumanization, including the theory of humanization, the risks of dehumanization posed in the ICU, and the complex tensions between the dehumanization necessary to allow ICUs to exist, and the dehumanization that causes needless harms to patients and families. He also offers suggestions for several ways forward.
Bent Kious was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry.

The collaborative paper by Leslie Francis, Sam Brown, and colleagues, “Let Them In: Family Presence during Intensive Care Unit Procedures,” is now e-published.

Peggy Battin was plenary speaker, World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies, in Amsterdam, May 13, 2016, and Pious Lecturer, Aurora Health Care, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 21, 2016. She will speak at Utah Care Managers Forum, August 2, 2016, and at the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Health Care, in Zabreb, August 18-20, 2016. In September, she will be a Visiting Researcher at the Brocher Foundation, Lake Geneva, Switzerland and in October, she will speak at Seattle University at a conference on Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking, (October 14-15.) Also in October, Salt Lake Acting Company will produce "Winter," a play by Julie Jensen, based on Peggy Battin’s short story, "Robeck."

Susan Sample presented a paper arguing for the rhetorical recognition of physicians' personal narratives as a new genre of medical literature at the 2016 conference of the Rhetoric Society of America in Atlanta May 28.