THE PROGRAM IN MEDICAL ETHICS AND HUMANITIES OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL MEDICINE AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF UTAH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Evening Ethics

“Exploring Frida Kahlo’s Artistic Expression of Her Body To Reclaim the Art of Medicine”

CO-FACILITATED BY
Dani Golomb
Third Year Medical Student
and Susan Sample, PhD, MFA,
Program in Medical Ethics and Humanities

Dani Golomb, a third-year medical student at the University of Utah, presented a unique poster in February 2018 at the Mount Sinai Third Annual Medical Student Conference, “Becoming a Physician: Ethical Challenges in Medical Education.” Golomb drew upon Marxist theory to understand how medicine has become a commodity that negatively impacts patient care. As she writes:

There is a transformative magic that does its work under the veil of capitalism. As Karl Marx wrote, workers imbue the objects of their labor (the commodities) with their own humanity. As a result, the commodities become animated, and the workers, objectified. Under the guise of modern health care and medical education, a similar phenomenon occurs. The insistence on evidence-based medicine and outcome-driven treatment goals causes patients to become objects while their diseases become life-like. The art of medicine is lost.

Medical students are the next generation of doctors, so it is essential that we explore, analyze, and deconstruct the “objectivity” that engulfs our health-care and education systems. We must take meticulous care to reclaim the art and profound responsibility of medicine. For both guidance and inspiration, I look to the oeuvre of Frida Kahlo. The Mexican artist was no stranger to illness or pain—scoliosis, polio, and most significantly, a near-fatal bus accident. What launched “her artistic voice as a painter of personal traumas and self-realization,” however, was a devastating and complicated abortion she had while living in Detroit in 1932. She struggled with injuries the rest of her life, attempting to integrate her suffering with the help of both her doctors and her art.

Golomb will present artwork by Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, the well-known muralist, to begin our discussion. What do we learn from their paintings as to how medical trainees as well as health-care providers can return dignity to our patients and work with them toward healing their suffering? How does their art challenge us to be accepting of a patient’s humanity, individuality, and intrinsic uncertainty?

For Background readings, Please contact linda.carrlee@hsc.utah.edu