

## Comics put to practice: Illness narratives as tools of empowerment in the medical sphere

Workshop by the PathoGraphics research project,  
Thursday, October 17 to Friday, October 18, 2019, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Illness narratives convey the personal and emotional experiences of patients, family members, healthcare workers and physicians. Reading literary fiction and patients' stories may enable doctors and other health professionals to better understand their patients, question their own cultural assumptions and critically reflect on ethical issues in the field of medicine. In the United States, the integration of literary texts into the curricula of medical schools is increasingly becoming common practice. Ventures such as the initiation of a narrative medicine program at Columbia University have helped both to establish this system in the US and to introduce it in Europe.

Literary illness stories and patient narratives are predominantly text based. However, the embodied experience of illness, pain, therapy, disability, or care can also – perhaps even more proficiently – be conveyed visually. This is where the comics medium, particularly the genre of 'graphic medicine' comes into play. The Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine (Hershey Medical Center) was among the first US institutions to introduce both literature and graphic storytelling into a medical school curriculum, and today similar programs have emerged in medical schools throughout Europe. If literature – as Alan Bleakley argued in 2015 – can introduce medical professionals to a necessary "tolerance of ambiguity" (*Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 21), what happens when doctors, patients, and medical staff work with comics, with their increased capacity of presenting multiple layers of meaning and therefore potential ambiguity through both text and images?

This workshop seeks to open dialogues between different national contexts (US and European) and divergent media (illness narratives in literary texts and comics). In one public keynote talk, two plenary papers and two round table discussions, we wish to delve into some of the following questions:

- How can the health humanities, medical training and education in a clinical context benefit from illness narratives?
- What are the differences between using literary texts or comics when working with students, clinicians, health professionals, or patients? How do comics tell their stories, and what can be achieved through the visualisation of bodies altered by illness?
- In seeking to implement graphic medicine into the medical / health care curriculum in Germany, what factors (i.e. students, colleagues, university structures, political agendas etc.) need to be taken into consideration? How would these considerations vary in other countries such as Austria, Denmark, the UK and the US?
- What are the collaborative possibilities between comic creators and medical professionals in developing patient information materials? Can these materials inspire therapeutic action in the form of patient participation?
- How can these projects be presented at an institutional level to ensure proper consideration and funding?

The workshop is organized by the PathoGraphics research team at Freie Universität Berlin, Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies, [www.fsgs.fu-berlin.de/pathographics](http://www.fsgs.fu-berlin.de/pathographics).

The keynote on Thursday, October 17, is open to the public without prior registration.

Admission to the workshop on Friday, October 18, is free, but seating is limited. Please register by October 4, 2019 at: [pathographics@fsgs.fu-berlin.de](mailto:pathographics@fsgs.fu-berlin.de).

## Program

Venue: Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies, room JK 33/121,  
Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin-Dahlem

### Thursday, October 17, 2019

- 6 pm **Michael Green, M.D.** (Professor of Humanities and Medicine, Physician and Bioethicist, Penn State University's Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Chair of the Hospital Ethics Committee, Director of the Program in Bioethics)  
**Keynote paper: *Using comics to teach and learn about doctoring: what, why & how***  
Introduction: Susan Squier
- 8 pm Dinner (à la carte) at restaurant "Luise" in Berlin-Dahlem

### Friday, October 18, 2019

- 9 am Welcome (Irmela Marei Krüger-Fürhoff)
- 9:30 **Dr. Anita Wohlmann** (Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz / Assistant Professor of Literature and Narrative Medicine, Department for the Study of Culture, Syddansk Universitet Odense, Denmark):  
***Narrative Medicine and the Usability of Text and Image***
- 11 am Coffee break
- 11:30 **Prof. Susan Merrill Squier**, PhD (Julia Gregg Brill Professor Emeritus of English and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University, Einstein Visiting Fellow of the PathoGraphics Research Project):  
***Graphic Medicine as a Third Space in the Medical/Health Humanities***
- 1 pm Lunch (light vegan Middle Eastern snacks at the Schlegel Graduate School)
- 2 pm **Round table 1: Using graphic medicine in medical teaching and training**  
Chair: stef lenk. With short presentations by:  
**Mag. Dr. Andrea Praschinger** (Teaching Center, Medical University of Vienna):  
***Using Medical Comics for Teaching Purposes***  
**Prof. Dr. Susanne Michl** (Charité Institute for the History of Medicine and Ethics in Medicine), **Prof. Dr. Irmela Marei Krüger-Fürhoff**, **Dr. Nina Schmidt**, **Ulrike Schulz** (PathoGraphics, Freie Universität Berlin):  
***Embodied experience and contested autonomy: Discussing comics on anorexia with medical students in an ethics of medicine lecture on therapy without patient consent***  
**Noemi Fabry** (research consultant, NHS Trusts, UK):  
**Tell Me More: Bringing the patient experience closer to clinicians**  
NHS stroke service comic in collaboration with the Stroke Association in England
- 4 pm Coffee break
- 4:30 **Round table 2: Using medical comics in patient communication**  
Chair: Susanne Michl. With short presentations by:  
**Dr. Anna Brand** (Charité Clinic for Cardiology and Angiology, Berlin), **Alexandra Hamann** (mintwissen science communication, Berlin):  
***Patient information comic on coronary angiography, Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin***  
**Dr. Anne Schirrmeister** and **Dr. Claudia Thomas** (Clinic for anesthesiology and intensive-care medicine, Universitätsklinikum Jena), **Sandra Bach** (illustrator):  
***Comic monkey takes children by hand: a patient information comic on anesthesia for children and their parents***  
**Elke Renate Steiner** (comics creator, Berlin):  
**comics for *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, comic *Risiken und Nebenwirkungen* (risks and side-effects)**
- 6:30 Final discussion: what's next?
- 8 pm Dinner (à la carte) at "Ristorante Galileo" in Berlin-Dahlem