

Laughter and Medicine

4-5 November 2024

Edgbaston Park Hotel & Conference Centre, University of Birmingham

Funders: British Academy, Wellcome Trust, University of Birmingham, Texas Tech University

How does laughter in all its complexity impact on medical care, illness and well-being, health care providers and patients? How does the history of artistic and cultural representations of laughter in—and at—medical contexts at once reflect or make sense of diverse medical experiences and function in relation to larger ideological, philosophical and other discourses? By linking these questions, *Laughter and Medicine* responds to the simultaneously physiological, mental and social nature of medical phenomena and offers a rare forum for dialogue between medical practice and the humanities and social sciences.

Convenors

Sabena Jameel (University of Birmingham Medical School)

Peter I. Barta (University of Surrey/Texas Tech University)

Lucas Wood (Texas Tech University)

Day 1, 4 November 2024

Registration

8:30-8:50

Opening Remarks

8:50-9:00

- Peter I. Barta (University of Surrey/Texas Tech University)

1. Laughing Together: Doctor-Patient Communication

9:00-10:30

Chair: Anna C. Whittaker (University of Stirling)

- Sabena Jameel (University of Birmingham Medical School), “I Do Not Trust Anyone Who Does Not Laugh”
- Mollie Huxley (University of Birmingham Medical School), “Laughter and Sexual and Reproductive Health”
- Gilles de Wildt (University of Birmingham Medical School), “The Laughter of the Angel from Brazil in the Consultation Room”

Tea and Coffee

10:30-10:45

2. Curative Laughter in the Ancient and Modern Worlds

10:45-12:15

Chair: Diana Spencer (University of Birmingham)

- David H. J. Larmour (Texas Tech University), “*Medicus ridens*: Mocking Medics in Roman Satire”
- Leonardo Costantini (University of Bristol), “A Celebration of Laughter: The *Risus* Episode (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 2.32-3.12)”
- Ute Oswald (University of Warwick), “‘Carriages to be ordered at Eleven, Horses’ heads to face the Moon’: Laughter and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century British Asylums”

Lunch

12:15-13:15

3. Skin Deep? Cosmetic and Psychological Consequences of Laughter

13:15-14:45

Chair: Ilija Rašović (University of Birmingham)

- Anna C. Whittaker (University of Sterling), “Sadness and Laughter: Impacts on Immunity and Health”
- Saul Konviser (Montagu Dental, London), “Laughing with Confidence: Putting the Mouth Back into the Body”
- Günter Burg (Universität Zürich), “What is Good for Your Soul May Be Bad for Your Skin”

Break

14:45-15:00

4. Visual Histories of Humour and Health: A Roundtable

15:00-16:00

Chair: Indira Ghose (Université de Fribourg)

- Christine Slobogin (University of Rochester)
- Katie Snow (University College Dublin)
- Laura Cowley (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Rebecca Whiteley (University of Birmingham)

Tea and Coffee

16:00-16:15

Keynote 1

16:15-17:30

Introduction: Lucas Wood (Texas Tech University)

- Cathérine Hug (Kunsthaus Zürich), “Incompatible? Art and Medicine’s Perfect Match”

Dinner

19:30-21:00

After-Dinner Presentation

21:00-22:00

Introduction: Sabena Jameel (University of Birmingham Medical School)

- Róisín McCallion (UK Medical Schools Council, London), “If You Don’t Laugh, You Cry: Mental Health and Comedy”

Day 2, 5 November 2024**Registration**

8:40-9:00

5. Vulnerability, Communication and Selfhood

9:00-10:30

Chair: Peter I. Barta (University of Surrey/Texas Tech University)

- Stephen Fay (University of Surrey), “‘I make me laugh’: Cathartic Self-Mockery in Stories by People with Dementia in Medellín, Colombia”
- Ivan Nenchev (Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin) and Benjamin Wilck (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), “Humour Appreciation in Schizophrenia: Clinical and Experimental Perspectives”
- Florence Vinit (Université du Québec à Montréal), “Do We Really Laugh with Clown Doctors? A Phenomenological Approach to the Place of Laughter in the Intervention of Therapeutic Clowns”

Tea and Coffee

10:30-10:45

Keynote 2

10:45-12:00

Introduction: Peter I. Barta (University of Surrey/Texas Tech University)

- Vincent Barras (Université de Lausanne), “The Paradoxes of Laughter and Humour in 19th- and 20th-Century Medicine”

Lunch

12:00-13:00

Keynote 3

13:00-14:15

Introduction : Sabena Jameel (University of Birmingham Medical School)

- Noga Arikha (Warburg Institute/École normale supérieure), “Laughter as Homeostasis: The Science and Experience of Intersubjectivity”

Break

14:15-14:30

6. A Cure for What Ails Us? Laughter and the (Dis)orders of Premodern Culture

14:30-16:00

Chair: David H. J. Larmour (Texas Tech University)

- Lucas Wood (Texas Tech University), “Mocking Medicine in the Medieval Fabliaux”
- Jody Enders (University of California, Santa Barbara), “Medicinal Justice and Comic Relief”
- Indira Ghose (Université de Fribourg), “Laughter and Pain in the Renaissance”

Tea and Coffee

16:00-16:15

7. Operating Theatres: Laughter and Medicine on Stage

16:15-17:45

Chair: Lucas Wood (Texas Tech University)

- Peter I. Barta (University of Surrey/Texas Tech University), “Laughing at the Doctor: The Physician as Comic Character in the Opera Buffa”
- Rose Whyman (University of Birmingham), “Acting Out Laughter: Chekhov’s Doctors on Stage”
- Raphael Kohn (University of Birmingham Medical School), “Laughing at the Unfunny Doctor: Power and Fear on Stage in 2023”