

Women and Health Lecture

Winifred J. Ellenchild Pinch, RN, EdD, FAAN

The Women and Health Lecture at Creighton University began in 1989 as an annual service event of the Center for Health Policy and Ethics (CHPE). Speakers are selected based on their interdisciplinary interest and/or expertise in health care and/or ethics with a particular focus on women. Thus far we featured sociologists, politicians, advocates, lawyers, nurses, philosophers, judges, theologians, and psychologists. In 2005 we selected a novelist for the first time and we moved the location for the lecture outside of the Creighton University campus.

The beginning...

In 1989, Dr. Katherine H Brown was an Assistant Director for Health Policy at CHPE and an Assistant Professor of Medicine and Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences. As a medical anthropologist, one of her special interests included minority and women's health issues. Her research and publications focused on sociocultural analyses of health problems and health care delivery systems. Based on these interests, Dr. Brown suggested the initiation of a women and health lecture. Her proposal was accepted and the first lecture was presented by Dr. Margaret MacKenzie, Assistant Professor of Humanities & Science, California College of Arts and Crafts (San Francisco, CA) on Monday, November 20, 1989 in the Creighton University Student Center Ballroom. Her lecture was "Our Bodies, Ourselves" was well received by the Creighton Community and a tradition was born.

Dr. Brown continued to plan, implement, and locate financial support for this lecture through 1993. A serious commitment was made by her to support these lectures through donations from a variety of community sources. There was a two-fold purpose for this approach. One, there was a goal to make these events free and open to the public, posing no financial burden on any woman who wanted to attend. Second, financial support from various agencies and institutions would create a vested interest in the lecture by the wider Omaha community and broaden the scope of women who would learn about the lectures. A complete list of the guest lectures for the entire series is located on CHPE's website, <http://chpe.creighton.edu/chpe/womenandhealth.htm>. She continued with her passion for women and health by incorporating politics and women's health, alcoholism and women, women and the American health care system, and health issues for black women in the lecture themes. Dr. Brown withdrew as the co-ordinator for the event in 1994 which resulted in the only break in the series of annual lectures. Although most of the lectures were held on the Creighton University campus, in 1992 lecture was held at the Fonda-McGuire Theater in the Omaha Community Playhouse.

Continuing endeavors...

Beginning in 1995, I assumed the role of director for the Women and Health Lecture. I undertook this position with the understanding that I would seek outside funding from appropriate agencies when possible, but also that the lecture become institutionalized as part of CHPE's programming and service projects. My admiration for the work of Dr. Susan Sherwin, author of *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Medicine* (1992), led me to invite her for my first event. Dr. Sherwin was Professor at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. I asked her to address the role of women in clinical research based on her preparation of a paper on women, ethics and clinical research for the distinguished Committee on Legal and Ethical Issues Relating to the Inclusion of Women in Clinical Studies, Institute of Medicine, Washington, DC in 1993. Successful

application of a grant from the Nebraska Humanities Council enabled us to financially support the lecture and maintain the status of a “free and open event to the public.”

I have continued to direct this project except for 1996 when I was on sabbatical. During that year, Dr. Ruth Purtilo, Director of CHPE took on the responsibilities for the lecture invitation and implementation. One difference in format that year was the use of a panel to respond to Ms. Karen Rothenberg, JD, MPA’s lecture on predictive genetic testing and breast cancer. Dr. Henry Lynch, internationally recognized for his involvement in discovering the BRCA I gene, Dr. Amy Haddad, nurse ethicist, and Debra Tomlinson Hoffman, Executive Director of “Every Woman Matters” formed the panel.

In planning such a project, one can often look to the “national scene” for an expert speaker and thereby miss valuable lecturers who reside locally. We have tried to balance our invitations by using local, regional, national, and international speakers. Local speakers included Dr. Maryanne Stevens from the College of St. Mary, The Honorable Patricia Lamberty, District Court Judge of Douglas County, Senator Deborah Suttle, District 10 of Omaha, and myself in 2003 when Dr. Purtilo was Director and asked me to provide the lecture. Although we have most often utilized women as speakers, we have not limited ourselves to women. However, we have only had a male speaker for one lecture—Dr. Steven Sabat who discussed his work with people who were diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease.

More recent developments...

An effort was regularly made to keep the topics for this lecture timely and important for the health of women, as well as contain relevant ethical implications. Perusing the individuals and titles for our entire series of lectures will affirm that we met such goals. Over the years, various supplementary activities accompanied the formal, public lecture. In a number of cases, we were able to plan visits to various classes on campus, hold invited lunches where members of the Creighton University campus or individuals from the broader Omaha community could interact with the guest lecturer on a more personal basis, or explore a recent publication of the guest with him/her in a seminar.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, we began to consider a literal “novel” approach to this public service event. Narrative ethics is a particular interest of mine and we began to think about a way to integrate this approach in our lecture series. Dr. Amy Haddad suggested that we consider women novelists whose work addresses health care issues and includes an ethical dimension. We all had favorite authors but we had to make a reasonable choice and our first lecturer in this venue was Ms. Elizabeth Berg. We asked her to provide an overview of her work. She subsequently developed quite an insightful lecture on “Literature as Medicine.” She created a wonderful presentation which combined health and ethics related to examples from a number of her novels. A more detailed report for this lecture can be found at the CHPE web site under Focus Newsletter in the Fall 2005 issue. Other reviews of earlier Women and Health Lectures can also be read in past issues of Focus, the CHPE’s newsletter.

Past Lectures...

- 2005 Elizabeth Berg, Bestselling Author
"Literature as Medicine"
- 2004 Marion Field Fass, Sc.D.
“Deciphering the AIDS Epidemic”

- 2003 Winifred J. Ellenchild Pinch, EdD
“When the Bough Broke: Continuing the Journey With Parents of High-risk Newborns”
- 2002 Steven R. Sabat, PhD
“In Praise of Enduring Relationships with People with Alzheimer’s Disease”
- 2001 Dr. Maryanne Stevens, RSM
“Women and Spiritual Health”
- 2000 The Honorable Patricia A. Lamberty
“Domestic Violence in Omaha: Cause and Effect and Impact on Our System”
- 1999 Senator Deborah Suttle
“Women’s Health: Beyond Reproduction”
- 1998 S. Kay Toombs, PhD
“Where Would SHE Like to Sit? The Personal and Societal Challenges of Chronic Illness and Disability”
- 1997 Jean deBlois, CSJ, RN, PhD
“Moral Discernment and Clinical Decisions: Does Gender Make A Difference?”
- 1996 Karen Rothenberg, JD, MPA
“Predictive Genetic Testing and Breast Cancer: Ethical, Legal and Social Challenges”
- 1995 Susan Sherwin, PhD
“Exploring the Ethical Dimensions of Women’s Role in Medical Research”
- 1993 Byllye Avery
“Empowerment Through Wellness: Health Issues of Black American Women”
- 1992 Emily Friedman
“The World Turned Upside Down: The Changing Impact of Women on the American Health Care System”
- 1991 Sharon C. Wilsnack, PhD
“New Knowledge About Problem Drinking in Women”
- 1990 JoAnne Howes
“The Politics of Women’s Health: Creating Change for a Healthier America”
- 1989 Margaret MacKenzie, PhD
“Our Bodies, Ourselves: Eating Disorders and Body Image from a Cultural Perspective”

Resources...

There is a critical body of literature which includes discussion of this most recent direction that we have taken with the Women and Health Lecture. For further exploration of the use of narrative in the discussion of health care ethics, consider consulting the following publications. They are arranged alphabetically, not in any particular order of importance.

1. Doane, G., Pauly, B., Brown, H., & McPherson, G. (2004). Exploring the heart of ethical nursing practice: Implications for ethics education. *Nursing Ethics*, 11(3), 240-253.
2. Elwyn, G., & Gwyn, R. (1999). Narrative based medicine: Stories we hear and stories we tell: Analyzing talk in clinical practice. *British Medical Journal*, 318(7177), 186-188.
3. Greenhalgh, T. (1999). Narrative based medicine: Narrative based medicine in an evidence based world. *British Medical Journal*, 318(7179), 323-325.
4. Greenhalgh, T. & Hurwitz, B. (1999). Narrative based medicine: Why study narrative? *British Medical Journal*, 318(7175), 48-50.
5. Hunter, K. M. (2003). Narrative. In S. G. Post (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* (pp. 1875-1880). New York: Macmillan Reference USA, Thomson Gale.
6. Jones, A. H. (1999). Narrative based medicine: Narrative in medical ethics. *British Medical Journal*, 318(7178), 253-256.
7. Launer, J. (1999). Narrative based medicine: A narrative approach to mental health in general practice. *British Medical Journal*, 318(7176), 117-119.
8. McCarty, J. (2003). Principlism or narrative ethics: Must we choose between them? Retrieved February 2, 2006 from www.medicalhumanities.com.
9. Montello, M. (13 May 2005). Novel perspectives on bioethics. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B6-B8.
10. Nelson, H.L. (1997). *Stories and their limits: Narrative approaches to bioethics*. New York: Routledge
11. Skott, C. (2003). Storied ethics: Conversations in nursing care. *Nursing Ethics*, 10(4), 368-376.
12. Tanner, D. T. (1999). The narrative imperative: Stories in medicine, illness and bioethics. *HEC-Forum*, 11(2), 155-159.