Illness is often perceived in broad, all-encompassing, textbook terms, but the experience of illness is an individual patient journey that can take on a variety of forms, meanings, and narrations. The illness narrative lends voice to patients, allowing them to explore and share their own experiences. Representations of illness experience have enriched culture in many contexts to the benefit of both patients and healthcare providers, and it is important to understand these representations as they related to body, voice, and narrative. What does narrative offer to the individual experience of illness? What effects does it have? How does narrative, as a mode of expression of the illness experience, showcase patient voice and lend insight into the depth and complexity of individual, lived experiences? What can be garnered from reading illness narratives in the context of the universal lived experience?

The 2016 Medical Humanities Conference at Boston College welcomes submissions from students across the northeast (undergraduate and graduate) exploring the intersections of medicine with the humanities and/or social sciences, including but not limited to topics of patient voice, the experience of illness, disability, or pain, or the role of narrative in expressing embodiment. Medical humanities is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding health, medicine, healthcare, illness, pain, suffering, life and death, focusing on how these topics are expressed, related, narrated, or experienced. This interdisciplinary nature of medical humanities opens the conference to contributors from any and all relevant fields. The goal of this student conference is to initiate discussion about the personal experience of illness and how the patient’s voice is expressed through narrative, and to build networks within this growing field.

Completed submissions are invited for the student conference, Body, Voice, Narrative: An Interdisciplinary Discussion in Medical Humanities, which will take place at Boston College on April 16, 2016. Submissions may focus on body image, health, representations in literature or in the media and popular culture, addiction, disability, cognitive disability, and mental health, as well as broader representations of illness. While submissions may touch on any aspect of medical humanities, they should relate to the particular themes of this conference: patient voice, the illness experience, and the illness narrative. Submissions might, for instance, include personal narratives of illness; critical papers on representations of illness in the media; historical healthcare practices or treatments of disease; studies of individual poets, artists, or writers whose works touch on some aspect of organic or mental illness; papers on ethical dilemmas in health fields, such as death with dignity. We will also consider personal narratives and art forms, such as drawing and painting, among others. Complete submissions -- which will be evaluated and selected for panel-style presentation and discussion at the student conference -- should be emailed to bcmhconference@gmail.com by January 20, 2016. Undergraduate and graduate students are welcome to submit.

Submission Guidelines:
Written submissions should be complete, 8 to 12 pages long, and include a title, the author’s name, institutional affiliation, and email address.
Non-written submissions (including art or poetry) should be complete, include a title, the author’s name, and the author’s institutional affiliation, and should be submitted with a brief (250-500 word), typed synopsis of the project.
Proposals should be submitted by January 20, 2016 in .doc/.docx or .pdf format. Proposals should be sent to bcmhconference@gmail.com. Selected submissions will be announced by February 21, 2016.