UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

History of Disability

2526-1-I0201D128-I0201D111M

Aims

The course aims to provide students with:

- Knowledge and understanding of the historical, cultural, and scientific evolution of the concepts of disability, care, and rehabilitation, from ancient civilizations to the contemporary age, with particular attention to the relationship between medicine and society;
- Ability to apply knowledge and understanding to critically analyze the different conceptions of disability and the models of assistance and rehabilitation throughout history, relating them to the paradigms of modern physiotherapy and to the principles of the biopsychosocial model;
- Independent judgment in assessing the impact of historical, technological, and scientific changes on the perception of disability and on the development of rehabilitative disciplines, recognizing the role of institutions and key figures in the evolution of healthcare systems;
- Communication skills to clearly and coherently present the main stages in the history of disability and rehabilitation, using language appropriate to a scientific context;
- Learning skills to independently explore, through historical sources and scientific literature, the relationship between medicine, physiotherapy, and society, developing critical thinking and an awareness of the humanistic dimension of care.

Contents

The course offers a historical and epistemological overview of the evolution of the concepts of disability, care, and rehabilitation, analyzing how different cultures and medical traditions have interpreted and addressed physical and mental fragility throughout the centuries. The main turning points in medical thought and therapeutic practices will be examined, from ancient medicine to the origins of modern rehabilitation, with attention to the social, cultural, and scientific contexts in which these changes occurred. The study of the history of disability will serve as a tool to understand the origins of contemporary models of inclusion and the role of rehabilitative medicine in promoting personal autonomy.

Detailed program

Instinctive medicine, regular medicine, and theurgic medicine. Disability in Pharaonic Egypt. Pre-Hippocratic Greek medicine. Hippocrates and rehabilitation. Medicine in ancient Rome (Asclepiades of Bithynia, Celsus, and Galen), medical thermalism. Disability and Christianity, the birth of hospitals, monastic medicine, Islamic medicine, and the Salernitan Medical School. Care of the disabled in late medieval hospitals, the plague of 1348, and the crisis of the medieval healthcare system. Humanism in medicine, the artistic rediscovery of the body, pre-Renaissance anatomy, Vesalius, and post-Vesalian anatomy. Girolamo Mercuriale and the motor discovery of the human body in De Arte gymnastica (1569). Ambroise Paré and the foundations of modern surgery and traumatology. Renaissance prostheses and aids. Galileo's experimental method in medicine. William Harvey and blood circulation; Marcello Malpighi and microscopic anatomy; the use of the microscope in medicine; medical academies (iatrochemistry, iatrophysics, and neo-Hippocratism); the failures of Baroque medicine. Eighteenth-century social medicine (Ramazzini, Pott, Andry); Tissot's medical gymnastics; medicine during the French Revolution. System theories. Mesmerism, homeopathy, and phrenology. The nineteenth century and rehabilitation: the dualism between kinetic and mechanical gymnastics; surgical and non-surgical orthopedics. The photography of the invisible (X-rays and cinematograph). Osteopathy and chiropractic. Twentieth-century rehabilitation (the tragedy of world wars, the poliomyelitis epidemic, and the birth of public health systems). Modern rehabilitation methods (Pilates, Mézières, Kabat, Doman, Vojta) and the Bobath Concept. Evolution of aids and prostheses, hand transplantation, and robotic rehabilitation. The biopsychosocial model in physiotherapy. The Italian contribution to the development of rehabilitation: the valorization of medical gymnastics (Mosso, Carlo Colombo); rehabilitative orthopedics (Gaetano Pini, Riccardo Galeazzi, the CTO centers, Rizzoli, Vanghetti); social rehabilitation (Don Luigi Monza, Don Carlo Gnocchi); person-centered rehabilitation (Milani Comparetti, Silvano Boccardi, Cecilia Morosini, Antonio Maglio) and the recognition of the physiotherapist profession.

Prerequisites

As indicated in the general syllabus of the Degree Program.

Teaching form

Lectures with moments of collective discussion. Students are invited to reflect on the historical and cultural evolution of the concept of disability, on the social role of rehabilitative medicine, and on the transformations of care and rehabilitation practices over time.

All lessons are held in person, in a lecture-based format: 4 classes of 2 hours each.

Language: Italian.

Textbook and teaching resource

Vittorio A. Sironi, **Superera la disabilità. Storia e antropologia della riabilitazione**, Roma: Carocci Ediore, 2022

Additional materials will be provided by the teacher.

Semester

1st semester, 1st year

Assessment method

Described in the subject's syllabus

Office hours

By appointment, writing to michele.riva@unimib.it

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY