



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Medicine in Myths and Tales

2627-2-H4103D091

Aims

This course aims to provide students with:

- knowledge and understanding of the historical evolution of medicine through the analysis of myths, legends, and popular beliefs, considered as valuable anthropological and cultural sources;
- the ability to apply acquired knowledge to critically interpret the medical and health-related content found in mythical and legendary narratives, including comparative analysis across different historical periods;
- independent judgment in developing critical reflections on the relationship between medicine, culture, and collective imagination, with particular focus on the persistence of pseudoscientific ideas in both clinical practice and society;
- communication skills to actively participate in group discussions and presentations on historical and anthropological topics related to medicine;
- learning skills to independently explore non-traditional sources and texts related to the history of medicine, fostering an interdisciplinary approach.

Contents

Myths and legends, as expressions of collective beliefs, are a valuable resource for understanding how health, illness, and the human body were conceived in various eras. This course explores mythical and legendary narratives from historical, anthropological, and medical perspectives, analyzing their role in shaping and transmitting medical knowledge.

Detailed program

- The use of myths and legends in the history of medicine
- Myths of ancient civilizations and symbolic medicine
- Medieval legends and healing figures
- Medical tales and folklore during the modern and Romantic periods
- Medicine and fairy tales: archetypes and metaphors of the body and disease
- Medical curiosities and borderline phenomena: spontaneous human combustion, phthiriasis, maternal imagination, sleepwalking, vampirism
- Twentieth-century myths and the persistence of pseudoscientific beliefs

Prerequisites

Enrollment in the second year of the Degree Program in Medicine and Surgery.

Teaching form

The course consists of 2 sessions of 3.5 hours each, held in person.
The first part is lecture-based (introductory theory);
the second part is interactive, encouraging discussion and student engagement.

Language of instruction: Italian

Textbook and teaching resource

Bondeson J. A cabinet of Medical curiosities. Cornell University, 1997

Additional materials will be provided by the teacher

Semester

Second semester

Assessment method

Final group discussion, aimed at assessing:

- understanding of the topics covered;
- critical thinking and oral communication skills;
- collaboration and contribution within the group.

Office hours

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

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
