

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 27) English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Transforming clinical understanding and the practice of health professionals through the Intercolated BA in Medical Humanities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Andrew Blades	Lecturer in Literature and Medicine	2014-2020
John Lee	Senior Lecturer in English	1997-2020
Ulrika Maude	Professor of Modern Literature	2012-2020
Maria Vaccarella	Lecturer in Medical Humanities	2015-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

The University of Bristol intercalated BA in Medical Humanities (iBAHM) is a unique programme that offers medicine and dentistry students a one-year degree in which they study English- and Philosophy-based approaches to Medical Humanities. Since 2013, 68 medical students have completed the iBAHM. The research-led teaching in literary studies foregrounds the importance of healing over curing and has had a transformative impact on former students' professional development, including on 1) their approach to clinical practice and the understanding of their role as clinicians in the NHS and overseas; 2) their patient-doctor relationships; and 3) their skills, professional development, creativity, and their own wellbeing.

2. Underpinning research

Since 2013, the teaching of Literature on the iBAHM has been led by the research of Blades, Lee, Maude and Vaccarella, each of whom focuses on the reciprocal relationship between literature and medicine. Together, their scholarship explores issues raised by the literary representation of illness (physical and mental), medical theory and practice, revealing historical changes in the understanding of medical conditions and of medicine itself, helping to understand how literature reflects, challenges and can better inform approaches to medical practice.

Blades's research [3.1] has unveiled how the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s invigorated American poetry and its reception, which in turn fuelled AIDS protests that were influential in the development of more effective forms of treatment. His emphasis on the medical and biomedical languages of HIV unveils how tropes and rhetoric govern even the most apparently neutral of terms, case studies and treatment plans. **Lee's** research [3.2] has analysed how Shakespeare's writing has aided soldiers and soldier poets of the First World War to make sense of the experiences of suffering, dying, grief and loss, but also the celebration of life. His most recent research is on Graphic Medicine, which he also teaches to students of the iBAHM. **Maude's** [3.3–3.5] research focuses on the ways in which medical culture shaped the form and content of modernist literature, which is characterised by radical formal experimentation and a thematic focus on embodiment, sensory perception, ageing, illness and disability. Partly in response to nineteenth-century discoveries in medicine, modernist literature represents a new type of subject whose agency is precarious and provisional. Discoveries in neurology have been particularly significant in this respect, for they unveiled that language production was a bodily function which often escaped the speaker's intention, rather than a transparent performance of the self. The work of Sigmund Freud, who trained as a doctor but who was also an avid reader of literature, in turn, exemplifies literature's influence as a model, paradigm, and hermeneutic method in the field of mental health. **Vaccarella's** research [3.6] focuses on epilepsy narratives and their representation of epilepsy surgery, which is often advocated by doctors but can be deeply injurious to the subject's sense of self. Through an emphasis on Garland-Thomson's notion of the 'giftedness of disability', Vaccarella reveals how epilepsy narratives can yield greater understanding of the patient's experience of invasive and life-altering forms of treatment and can foster an appreciation of neurodiversity. Her more recent research has focused on illness as fiction.'

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The teaching and supervision of iBAMH students in the English Department focuses on the ways in which literature can inform medical practice by historicising disease categories, enhancing the clinician's understanding of illness experience, improving narrative competency, and foregrounding communication skills and the importance of verbal expression in the clinical encounter. While medicine has left its mark on the form and content of literary works, literature has influenced medical understanding by anticipating, feeding back, critiquing, and inspiring the medical imagination.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 **Blades A** (2017). The Past Is Not a Foreign Country: John Weir's AIDS Fiction, *Studies in American Fiction*, **44:1**, pp.139-160, <https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.2017.0005>
- 3.2 **Lee J** (2009). Shakespeare and the Great War, in Kendall T(ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, Oxford University Press, pp.134-152 [Available on request]
- 3.3 **Maude U** (2015). Literature and Neurology, in Hillman D & **Maude U** (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, Cambridge University Press [Available on request]
- 3.4 **Maude U** (2018). Modernism, Neurology and the Invention of Psychoanalysis, in **Maude U** and Nixon M (eds.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature*, Bloomsbury [Available on request]
- 3.5 **Maude U** (2019). 'Que Voulez-vous?' Beckett, Nerve Theory and Literary Form, in Rabaté JM (ed.) *The New Samuel Beckett Studies*, Cambridge University Press, pp.175-194 [Available on request]
- 3.6 **Vaccarella M** (2015). Disembodiment and Identity in Literary Depictions of Epilepsy Surgery, *Literature and Medicine*, **33:1**, pp.1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2015.0004>

Grants

- **Maude U** (Co-I), [Adolescence, digital technology and mental health care: exploring opportunity and harm](#), MRC, MR/T046716/1, (PI: Biddle L, University of Bristol), March 2020-February 2021, GBP100,809
- Bates V, Carel H (University of Bristol), **Lee J** and **Maude U**, *Medical Humanities Research Strand*, Wellcome Trust ISSF-3, August 2018-July 2020, GBP50,000
- **Vaccarella M** (PI), *Illness as Fiction*, Leverhulme/British Academy Small Grant, SRG/170792, May 2018-August 2021, GBP7,810
- **Blades A**, *Retroviral Cultures: Twenty Years On*, BAAS/US Embassy Small Research Grant, October 2016-December 2016, GBP1,579
- **Maude U**, *Modernism and Medicine*, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (University of Helsinki) Research Fellowship, September 2015-July 2016, EUR65,879
- **Maude U** (PI), [Modernism, Medicine and the Embodied Mind: Investigating Disorders of the Self](#), AHRC Networking Award, AH/M006883/1, February 2015-October 2016, GBP35,953

4. Details of the impact

The research conducted by Blades, Lee, Maude and Vaccarella since 2009 [3.1-3.6] has informed the University of Bristol's intercalated BA in Medical Humanities (iBAHM). The innovative programme – the first of its kind – offers medicine and dentistry students a one-year degree programme run exclusively by Arts and Humanities disciplines [5.4]: the Departments of English and Philosophy [5.4]. Between 2013 and 2020, the iBAMH has seen 68 graduates who are now practicing clinicians working in the NHS, in Public Health and at hospitals abroad. Students are required to take three compulsory units in English: Critical Issues, Literature and Medicine, and the Dissertation. The iBAMH has transformed former students' clinical practice and led to improved interaction between clinicians and patients by encouraging a more empathetic approach. It has developed former students' skills, enhanced their professional creativity and resilience, and provided strategies for preventing burnout. Overall, the findings of the case study demonstrate the transformative impact of medical humanities teaching at the Department of English to students of medicine and dentistry.

The English Department's compulsory 'Critical Issues' unit introduces a range of literary-critical and cultural theories, as well as providing students with an understanding of feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and the constructed nature of categories such as race. The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of 'Literature and Medicine', in turn, include issues raised by

the literary representation of illness (physical and mental), medical theory and practice, and an awareness of historical changes in the understanding of medical conditions and of medicine itself. The unit also aims to make students, through reading, seminar discussion and essay writing, more self-aware and more discerningly critical in their responses to literature and medicine. The Dissertation unit, finally, gives students the chance to develop in-depth work of a topic of their choice.

Transforming the Role of the Doctor and Clinicians' Approach to their Practice

Evidence from interviews and questionnaires [5.1, 5.2, 5.5] demonstrates that the iBAMH has had a transformative impact on former students' understanding of their role as doctors and on their clinical practice, by emphasising a patient-centred approach to healthcare that is focused not only on curing, but also on caring for patients. As one student put it, being a doctor is 'about just helping people' [5.2]. A 2020 survey of former iBAMH students [5.5] found that:

- 95% of respondents believe that the iBAMH has made them better doctors;
- 95% of respondents agree that the iBAMH has 'influenced their clinical practice';
- 100% of respondents feel that the degree has 'changed their perspective on the clinical practice of medicine and enhanced their medical training'.

One former student states that the iBAMH degree has helped her to feel 'comfortable in feeling uncomfortable' and that she now feels 'more comfortable with a silence or a difficult diagnosis for someone' [5.2]. In questionnaires [5.1], former students comment that:

- The iBAMH has encouraged the 'art of caring' and emphasised 'healing over curing,' which former students report, is often lost in purely evidence-based medicine;
- The iBAMH 'influences my clinical work every day... my clinical decisions, my interactions with patients, my thoughts about current research, about system, structure and process';
- The iBAMH has 'developed my creative/ philosophical/ spiritual self and I try to hold onto this in my everyday practice'.

It is often in the less-obvious branches of medicine that former students have found literary studies to have made the most striking difference: it has helped to establish and to promote 'the art of caring' and 'artistic creativity' in acute fields such as emergency medicine and surgery, where there is little opportunity for interaction between doctor and patient. A former iBAMH student, who now works in Emergency Medicine in Australia, notes how 'There is an emphasis on "Evidence Based Medicine" and academic research – both of which are important. But the patient doesn't care about these things. It is precisely in these acute specialties that we should be nurturing artistic creativity. To establish and continue the art of caring. [...] The [iBAMH] allowed me to take a step back from the medical frontline, to observe at a more metaphysical distance; to question the questions, to ask the why and the how of matters.' [5.1].

The degree has given former students a broader perspective on illness, a recognition of the importance of 'the Arts in Medicine', and, as one put it, 'broaden[ed] my horizons out of the scientific sphere' [5.2]. It has taught them 'not to push the ethical side of practice under the rug in any way', and to see that 'people who understand medicine but also have a really widespread set of interests are more well-rounded and likely to be doing better work' [5.2]. The degree has inspired them to introduce creative practices into clinical work, for example by writing and displaying poetry on hospital wards. It has made the practice of medicine more interesting through 'a lifelong enriched perspective on my profession and my role within it' [5.1]. The degree has prompted a 'healthy scepticism of our practice' and enhanced critical reflection ('to pause and think'; 'loads of reflection and self-reflection on our practice'). Former students also report that the iBAMH degree has prompted them, where appropriate, to direct the patient to 'non-pharmacological management' of their condition ('I will often talk to patients about other things they can do that aren't tablets or aren't referrals that might make people feel a bit better') [5.2].

Improving the Doctor-Patient Relationship

Former iBAMH students report that the degree has made their clinical encounters more patient-centred and has enhanced their understanding and appreciation of patient experience. A survey of alumni [5.5] found that:

- 95% of respondents feel that iBAMH has changed their interactions with patients;
- 95% feel that the degree has improved them as doctors;

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- 86% feel that the degree has made them more caring towards patients;
- 90% feel that the degree has helped them to better understand patients;
- 91% feel that their patients have benefited from the experiences and knowledge they gained from the iBAMH degree;
- 82% state that the iBAMH has put patient experience at the heart of what they do;
- 73% feel that the degree has made them more empathetic towards patients;
- 100% feel that the iBAMH has helped them consider alternative approaches to patient care.

The iBAMH has alerted former students to the fact that their 'role is not simply to diagnose and treat disease but to see the person suffering from the disease', and that their role is not merely 'scientific' but broader and more complex: 'in clinical practice, our role is to allow the patient to take centre stage [...] the iBAMH allowed me to appreciate this perspective and not feel overwhelmed by it' [5.1]. The degree has given former students an understanding of the importance of 'how you approach people and look after people' – 'the patient perspective' – and of 'getting a wider understanding of the person you are treating'. One former student states that the iBAMH has provided 'a much deeper understanding of the lived experience of illness, both from a historical and contemporary perspective' and engendered a more careful consideration of the patient's own experience of their condition [5.5]. Former students report that the iBAMH has helped highlight the importance of communication with patients and colleagues ('openness and connectedness with colleagues', 'developing yourself and your relationship with patients'; 'my ability to be a good doctor and to value aspects of my practice which are non-knowledge-based'). They report that the degree has improved communication skills in the clinical encounter [5.2]. One former student states that, through the study of literature, the degree generated an understanding of the importance of 'putting the person at the heart of medical care' [5.1]. The study of literature on the iBAMH is also reported to have enhanced narrative competence and given former students a better understanding of the patient's story while broadening their knowledge of patient care. One former student states that 'narrative medicine [...] has helped me develop empathy with my patients' [5.5].

Improving Professional Development and Wellbeing of Clinicians

Former iBAMH students overwhelmingly agree that the degree has enhanced their skillset, wellbeing, creativity and professional prospects.

Skills and Employability

The iBAMH provided students with new skillsets, including writing, presenting, researching and/or project management. In Skype interviews [5.2] and in questionnaires [5.5]:

- 100% of former students state that the Literature units and the Dissertation helped to improve their writing skills, which has had a positive impact on patient notes, referral letters, literature reviews, and academic papers ('my writing ability just shot up throughout the course'; 'constructing an argument, structuring an essay, or even in medical notes [...] how to convey what you intend to say on paper. That was a big skill.' [5.2]);
- 90% of participants feel that the degree has enhanced their employability as clinicians;
- 95% report that they have shared learning from the iBAMH with other colleagues.

The iBAMH has helped alumni to win places on ambitious electives and foundation programmes ('quite a prestigious elective in [...] medical journalism'; 'an academic foundation post in education [...] and completing a PGCE in clinical education'; 'enabled me to complete work experience at the *Health Service Journal*' [5.1]). The degree has helped with project management and management roles (to 'link science and the human side') and has generated interest in job interviews ('It is always a great talking point in interviews' [5.5]). Some students report feeling that they were recruited precisely because they had taken the iBAMH degree [5.2].

Creativity

95% of respondents believe that the iBAMH has enhanced their creativity in the profession [5.5] ('we all had to make a piece of artwork or a creative piece'; 'learning to use the other side of my brain and having confidence to do that, and giving that worth'; 'nourishing for my soul' [5.2]). Examples include a patient and staff poetry project displayed on the wards; becoming a 'cemetery tour guide, at Arnos Vale Cemetery [Bristol]' [5.2]; editing a poetry magazine; and

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doing a photography project and exhibition at Scarborough Hospital [5.1]. The iBAMH has made the practice of medicine more interesting through ‘a lifelong enriched perspective on my profession and my role within it’ [5.1].

Lifelong Learning

95% of respondents report that since studying for the iBAMH, they have continued to learn more about Medical Humanities [5.5] (e.g. taking a ‘narrative therapy’ course that drew on ‘what I knew of literary theory’; organising ‘a Medical Humanities SSC [...] for medical students’ [5.2]). Former students also reported that studying literature on the iBAMH had sparked an interest in specialising in Psychiatry and mental health – fields of medicine that are under-recruiting – as well as other more ‘holistic’ branches of medicine such as general practice, palliative care, and mental health ‘rather than ones that traditionally aren’t very holistic, like surgery’ (as one respondent commented, ‘literature [...] enriches my understanding of how the mind works’ [5.2.]). One student argues that the iBAMH ‘has taught me to really consider the different illness narratives in more depth – rather than this just being a term which is banded about in medical school.’ [5.5] The course also encouraged and prompted alumni to give research/training presentations on Medical Humanities topics. The co-creation of the Medicine 360 Festival (2020), a multimedia exhibition developed out of a 10-year collaboration between the staff, students, and graduates of the iBAMH, is an example of former students’ ongoing engagement with and interest in Medical Humanities [5.3].

Personal Wellbeing

82% of respondents feel that the iBAMH has given them confidence in what is often a very hard job [5.5] (it ‘fosters the ability to admit a few weaknesses or vulnerabilities and [to] be able to share that amongst your work colleagues or even patients [...] and develop closer relationships which I think is vital in Medicine to prevent burnout’ [5.2]). The interest in literature that the iBAMH has sparked has also had an ameliorative effect: ‘when you feel like you’re detached from your clinical work or from your patients, just seeking literature that resonates with you, that puts you back in a mood of empathy’ [5.1]. 95% of former students state that the degree has improved their own wellbeing [5.5]: one comments that the iBAMH ‘enhanced my wellbeing, which is something which prevents some doctors from doing their job well’ [5.2].

Demonstrating the Benefits and Need for Medical Humanities in Clinical Education

The iBAMH has demonstrated that there is a need for medical humanities in medical and dental education. 100% of respondents feel that medical professionals would benefit from the inclusion of medical humanities as part of their training [5.5]: ‘there is a definite place for Medical Humanities in medical and dental education, as I believe it makes a more well-rounded clinician’ [5.1]. Former students report that the degree is ‘career-changing, if not life-changing’, that it ‘vastly changed the course of my career’, and that ‘what it’s changed is the fundamental way in which [...] you think about the world’ [5.2.]. The course has prompted at least one student to take an MA in Medical Humanities and she has since gone on to take a PhD, while another has taken an MA in English. The degree has helped former students ‘to understand the way in which society can impact on mental illness, but also the way in which it frames illness and disease in the world’. The iBAMH has allowed former students to ‘appreciate Medicine in different forms’ while enhancing ‘time-management’ [5.2]. It has also helped them to forge an understanding of the doctor as both ‘scientist and artist’ and of medicine as ‘a blend of scientific and personal/human factors’ [5.1]. Further, it has inspired enthusiasm for the arts, which are often turned to in reflecting on clinical practice and offers ‘a character-forming time of development and learning’ [5.5]; ‘A lot of us describe it as the best year of medicine’ [5.2].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Questionnaires of former iBAMH students who are now practicing clinicians (2018)
- 5.2 Transcribed Skype interviews of former students who are now practicing doctors (2019)
- 5.3 [Medicine 360](#), 2020, co-produced in Bristol with former iBAMH students [Accessed 10/2/21]
- 5.4 Information on different Medical Humanities degrees in the UK (collated 2020)
- 5.5 Impact questionnaires distributed to alumni (July 2020)