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**WiSER**  
WITS INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL  
AND ECONOMIC RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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## **Global academic collaboration – a first for medical and health humanities in Africa**

Medical humanities is a well-established field in the UK and USA but an emerging field on the African continent. The BMJ's *Medical Humanities Journal* will soon publish the first English-language special issue to deal exclusively with work on and about Medical and Health Humanities (MHH) in Africa. The Journal will showcase the work of new and established academics and practitioners working in the field in the December 2018 special issue and accompanying series of blogs and podcasts.

Renamed Medical and Health Humanities here to indicate a more expansive notion of health and healing, the field is growing and attracting a lot of interest from academics, researchers, practitioners, creative artists, health care seekers and providers, and any and all people curious about how we might improve our understandings of health and wellness. To date there have been conferences and events in South Africa and Malawi and a Medical and Health Humanities Africa network (<https://medicalandhealthhumanitiesafrica.wordpress.com>) - open to everyone to join - has been formed.

The idea for this special issue came out of discussions among members of this network. Working collectively to allow greater participation, universities shared resources to bring potential contributors together for a workshop held at Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) in 2017. Participants came from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi, Swaziland, the UK and Canada and presented and discussed their work. Beyond just preparing for the special issue, this workshop sought to develop the network and install an ethos of collective and collaborative work that is intellectually rigorous but defined by care and consideration. Participants contributed to the special issue and the blog in a variety of formats allowing the journal to present work that is not confined just to academic articles.

The end results of this process are evident in the special issue and blogs, which represent epistemic generosity and curiosity on the part of all concerned. The blog includes podcasts, photographs, music, images, poetry, musings, and written pieces (<https://blogs.bmj.com/medical-humanities>).

The articles in the special issue are all linked by the themes of inclusion, access, and social justice and cover a variety of thought-provoking topics. Contributors have written about and compared their experiences of doing interdisciplinary work; challenged how, and for whom, knowledge is written; discussed the importance of historical consciousness in teaching health sciences students; and identified some of the challenges of introducing critical medical and health humanities curricula. Articles also showcase exciting new projects and developments in disciplines and include a look at the significance of understanding the histories of three different pharmaceuticals in three different time periods to southern African history; digital storytelling and ARV adherence; moving beyond the lab to collaboratively explore TB with youth; and the relationship between street pesticides and childhood poisoning.

All the blog content is freely available and several of the articles will be made open access. This is the beginning of a growing evolution in medical and health humanities in Africa and while we make no claims to comprehensive coverage of medical and health humanities work across the entire continent (this is the next step), we believe this special issue represents a diversity of thought and practice that is indicative of the strength of the field across the continent – ranging from engaged activism toward theorising new spaces, and taking in the full gamut of disciplinary approaches from the creative arts, to sociology, history, anthropology, and clinical practice. We would like to invite everyone to explore what has been going on and consider shaping what comes after.

To access the special issue: please visit <https://mh.bmj.com/>

To read the first editorial: <https://mh.bmj.com/content/44/4/218>

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***ENDS***

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