



Ben Belknap, MS1, and two children from Betina's village in Kingiti, Tanzania.

HEART: Humanism in Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Betina

The Solitary Plight of AIDS in
Sub-Saharan Africa

by Ben Belknap, MS1

The tragedy of AIDS as an African epidemic is not merely that people die. On this continent, death is ubiquitous and there are a number of other diseases that kill many more than this virus-born affliction. The essential tragedy of this disease is that those suffering from it often meet their end alone, more alone than most outside of this place could possibly know.

Betina had remained in her rope bed for the previous two weeks when our unexpected visit compelled her skin-wrapped bones to carefully step out of the red clay hut. She wore only a dirty kanga wrapped around her torso and tucked above her deflated breasts. This once colorful sheet of fabric was now worn down to the threads, the Swahili proverb printed on its frayed edges no longer legible. She crept along with the help of a great wooden staff that shown the amber polish of extensive handling. This dark patina was a testament to the assistance it had provided her ancestor's in their dying days, and now it was hers. It was Betina's at the age of 28.

As Peter and I approached the house, Betina's mother nervously greeted us with a shifting smile. Peter, a weathered nurse

from London, and I, his interpreter, had only just met a couple months prior and now the house visits were becoming more frequent. In the very rural villages we struck a formidable, if not abjectly frightful, sight for many- our silver and golden shocks of hair floating above the sharpest of footfalls appears so absurdly foreign in these places. Despite the many benevolent intentions of recent, sight of the *wazungu* often brings terror to the faces of the very young and the very old, those whose familiarity with our race is narrow or none. But it is hardly just the unusual color of our skin that evokes apprehension; it is our mannerisms, our speech, our gait, in short, it is our rigidity. The old woman called for Betina to come out and then promptly excused herself from our direct gaze. Once outside, Betina bent her stiff frame and sat on the log bench in front of us, while her mother cooked over the three stones on the side of the hut. The *ugali*, a thick staple food made from simple corn flour, had already been prepared and she was now stirring a small clay pot containing a meager portion of greens locally known as *mlenda*.

The interview with Betina provided little information or opportunity for us. She only referred to her condition as being plagued by stomach ulcers and some diffuse pain down her legs, but otherwise requiring no reason for concern. With pathetic futility she was hoping to appear in overall decent health, lest anyone suspect that she was one

of those cursed with the dreaded *ukimwi* (AIDS). For treatment, she was taking traditional medicines, a mixture of locally prescribed leaves and roots that are pounded and then brewed into a hot tea. These plants have been used for ages in this region and are sought in the mountains above the village. Her disregard for professional treatment, and the free anti-retroviral medications available in town, embarrassed her beneath the exacting eyes of the two visitors. She grew quiet and despondent. In an un-communicated aside, I vainly appealed for her cooperation, but Betina sat blank. The immense cultural divide between East African villagers and Westerners often results in exchanges falling short of true communication; when a language is shared but trust and understanding is not. In traversing these difficulties, sometimes the tone, context, and the intentions apparent in the interaction can result in a clear connection. But at other times, you are not so lucky.

The *mlenda* had finally thickened and, with hands like a baseball mitt, the old woman swept up the bubbling pot and took it inside the small hut. The family began to eat, but Betina remained outside, uninvited.

"Have you eaten today?" I asked her sternly.

"Yes," Betina said, looking bravely into my green eyes. ■

HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH HEART

If you have questions about or wish to participate in any of HEART's projects or initiatives, please contact the designated representatives below.

We look forward to welcoming new members to our team!

HEART Committee

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HEART Newsletter

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Ben Belknap, MS₁
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Sara Woodring, MS₃
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Gold Humanism Honor Society

Dr. Pradip D. Patel
Dr. Olivia Mittel

Humanities: Art in Medicine

Dylan Brock, MS₂

Systole Literary magazine

Dr. Olivia Mittel

Letter From the Editors

In this winter edition of the HEART newsletter, our editorial board finds much to be thankful for. We are particularly grateful for energetic new contributors and a plethora of humanism-centered events on campus, which have allowed for this six-page Volume!

This collection of submissions illustrates the wide variety of opportunities that UofL students, residents, and faculty members have to develop qualities such as empathy and altruism. Our current front-page feature, *Betina*, is an exemplar of humanism in medicine in a few ways. The loneliness of the main character is described in a manner to which all can relate, regardless of personal experience. Furthermore, by recording his experience in narrative form, Ben is able to share both his experience with the patient and with the environment in which she lives. Events such as Cultural Competency Day and those held by ECHO are excellent chances for students to learn actively within the Louisville community and surrounding areas. We are fortunate to have access to the influence of humanists such as Wendell Berry, whose advocacy of community is increasingly important in the current state of the medical system. We were proud that our many humanism-centered events allowed our representatives at the GHHS Biennial Conference to make a strong impression on the GHHS at a national level.

Along with HEART's strengths comes room to improve. While our student chapter of the GHHS is incredibly active (as evidenced by our strong showing at the Biennial Conference), we have yet to adequately engage our Resident GHHS members. Any current residents, who were inducted into the GHHS during medical school, whether at UofL or elsewhere, are encouraged to get in touch with Drs. Patel or Mittel. Through longitudinal involvement with our GHHS chapter, ULSOM hopes to continually foster the Humanistic qualities across the educational continuum.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to recognize the accomplishments of one of our own: HEART Newsletter co-editor Francesca Kingery recently presented an award-winning poster entitled "Crossing Borders and Disciplines: New Horizons in Global Health" at the UK Global Health Conference. Congratulations, Francesca! We are proud to have your talents on our team!

One final "Thanks" to all of our readers who promote Humanism in Medicine on a daily basis. We look forward to sharing your stories in future Volumes!

Jessica Huber, Allison Wilcox, Francesca Kingery, Ben Belknap, and Pradip D. Patel, MD, Co-Editors ■

Building on a Decade of Humanism in Action

Reflections on The Gold Humanism Honor Society 5th Biennial Conference

by Jessica Huber, MS3



In early October, four representatives from ULSOM traveled to Chicago, IL for the Gold Humanism Honor Society's Fifth Biennial Conference. Dr. Pradip D. Patel, Dan Arnold, PGY-1, Alex Bajorek, MS4, and Jessica Huber, MS3 spent an exciting weekend networking with like-minded colleagues and sharing ideas for promoting Humanism in Medicine. The Conference also celebrated ten years of the GHHS, which now has over one hundred medical school chapters.

The UofL team had a peer-reviewed poster accepted for presentation, which featured four of the major projects of the HEART Committee: the HEART2Heart discussion series, *Systole* Literary Magazine, the HEART Newsletter, and our school's chapter of the GHHS. The poster was a great success, and the reception attendees were impressed by the variety and quality of humanism-highlighting products our Committee yields.

The remainder of the conference programming consisted of breakout interest sessions, round-table "Gold-Mining" for



ideas, constituency meetings for students, residents, and faculty, and nightly keynote addresses. The final evening celebrated the achievements of several distinguished faculty and physicians, including our own Dr. Patel, who was inducted into the GHHS during the ceremony!

Students at the meeting remarked how refreshingly distinct the atmosphere of this gathering seemed compared to other professional conferences. The sharing of ideas was in the spirit of true collaboration for the benefit of patients and

their communities, and not at all for notoriety or professional gain. Our team benefited greatly from this immersion in the cultivating culture of Humanism at the GHHS Conference, and hopes to infuse this positive energy into our own chapter of the GHHS as it continues to thrive within our medical community. ■

Above: Alex Bajorek (left) and Jessica Huber (center) discuss projects and products of the ULSOM GHHS chapter at the Poster Reception in Chicago.

Left: Dr. Pradip D. Patel (center), Chair of the ULSOM HEART Committee, is pictured with his cohort of faculty inductees to the Gold Humanism Honor Society. Congratulations, Dr. Patel!



Make an Impact – Get involved with ECHO!

by Francesca Kingery, MS1

What is ECHO?

Many health professionals feel called to medicine because of its connection to serving others. However, throughout training and into one's career, it can be difficult to get involved in high impact community service projects. ECHO, a budding service organization on campus, aims to foster the desire for service among students while creating strong connections between ULSOM and the Louisville community. ECHO stands for **Empowering Communities through Helping Others** and was created by Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS). ECHO hopes to act as an umbrella organization for all service events on campus. By establishing long-term service projects and linking short-term projects of other student organizations, ECHO aims to create high impact service options for students.

Current Projects

Current ongoing projects under ECHO include Nativity Academy, Family Scholar House and Adelante Hispanic Achievers. **Nativity Academy**, located just a few blocks from campus, is an independent Catholic middle school serving low-income families who would not otherwise have access to a private education. Students are chosen from Louisville elementary schools after showing academic excellence. Every Wednesday students from ULSOM teach hour-long after school enrichment sessions on health and science in Nativity's After School program. Classes have included projects like extracting DNA from strawberries and "Guess the Organ" games. The program was started by current second year students Cullen Clark, Shawn Greschel and Katie Kenney.



Family Scholar House is a local non-profit designed to combat the cycle of poverty by giving single-parent students the support they need to earn a four-year college degree. ECHO will be hosting workshops for Scholar House residents throughout the months of November and December. **Adelante Hispanic Achievers** is a program designed to empower Louisville's Hispanic Youth. Students from ULSOM worked with Adelante in November to teach First-Aid Basics to its middle and high school participants.

How can I get involved?

ECHO plans to have 2 class-wide volunteer projects every month that are convenient to student's schedules. There are 3 ways to be involved:

1. **ECHO Participant:** When there are service opportunities you will be notified through email. If you are available, sign up and participate. Simple as that!
2. **ECHO Leadership Committee:** For those looking to be more involved in serving the community, the Leadership Committee will meet once a month to plan service events, contact organizations and arrange logistics. Each committee member will have the goal to be involved in the planning of one service opportunity per semester.
3. **College Captain:** As a College Captain, you will be in charge of promoting ECHO service and learning opportunities to those students in your college and give suggestions to the ECHO Leadership Committee on what projects your college would be interested in having organized.

If you'd like to be involved in ECHO, email the ECHO leadership team:

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Gheens Foundation Lecture Series – Fall Review

by Allison Wilcox, MS2

Relationships. Mutual responsibility. Community. These words and ideas have long permeated religion, politics, and yes, even medicine. In the recent past, however, these values have often taken a backseat in the practice of medicine as different interests have come into conflict to define our profession. Yet over the past few months at UofL a conversation has started that would seek to return our attentions to these values and what it truly means to care for fellow human beings.

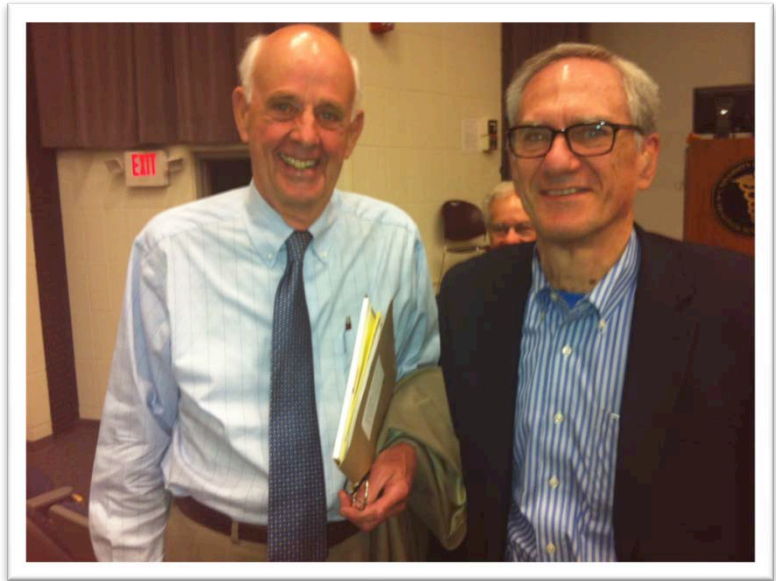
Wendell Berry is one of the most prolific and respected American writers and thinkers, and he just happens to be from Henry County, KY. From his home base less than an hour from our classrooms, Mr. Berry, a recipient of the National Humanities Medal and other high honors, continues to voice concern about the current trend in America away from community. On August 21st, Mr. Berry spoke to the UofL community as the Fall 2012 James L. Stambaugh, Jr., M.D. Lecturer in Humanities in Medicine. During his talk, Mr. Berry shared his thoughts on medicine and the potential fractionalization brought on by specialization. Mr. Berry made an analogy between farming, his lifelong vocation, and medicine, pointing out that when specialists in either field lose sight of their role within a greater community, they jeopardize their own productive capacity, as well as that of their colleagues. Specialization, Mr. Berry argued, should be implemented in such a way as to strengthen the whole, rather than to fracture it into disunited pieces.

Another prescient argument levied by Mr. Berry was one in which he tied together entities that are not often addressed together: “health-food-agriculture-ecology.” In linking these facets of society, Mr. Berry pointed out that what we do in medicine is not unrelated to the environment, and that our responsibility to fellow humans is not strictly limited to our direct interactions with patients, colleagues, or neighbors. Rather, our mutual responsibility to each other includes a responsibility to care for this planet that we all share. The health of a community’s inhabitants, Mr. Berry argued, is intimately connected to the health of the environment – on both local and global scales. Among the most immediate connections between health and ecology, of course, are the food we produce and consume, and the air we breathe. For those interested, Mr. Berry’s writings explore these and other topics in eloquent detail, and are well worth a perusal.

A few weeks following Mr. Berry’s talk, Dr. Jim O’Connell, the Medical Director of Boston’s Healthcare for the Homeless, gave a lecture as a Gheens Foundation Visiting Scholar in Humanism and Medicine. Dr. O’Connell’s work exemplifies Mr. Berry’s ethic of community. Dr. O’Connell has built a career serving patients within the greater Boston area who often are without a bed to sleep in, let alone a doctor to help alleviate their *dis-ease*. Dr. O’Connell’s presentation introduced us to some of his patients, describing their lives and medical problems, and the many and varied challenges inherent in care delivery for the homeless. People who are homeless face many common illnesses, but also ailments unique to the transience of their lives. All told providing care to people who are homeless is an extraordinarily complex feat. But Dr. O’Connell’s work demonstrates that we in healthcare are capable of making a profound contribution to our communities if we value each individual’s health and strive to leave no one behind.

As members of the UofL community, we owe it to each other to continue the conversation started by Mr. Berry and Dr. O’Connell. There are flashier aspects of medicine that can consume our energy, from the challenge of rising healthcare costs to the promises of scientific advancements. Yet these are just a part of our work. We cannot forget that medicine is also a vocation that depends on the cultivation of relationships and communities in order to truly provide care.

To view to Gheens Lectures you may have missed, or to watch again, visit <https://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/gheens-foundation-humanism/id431433608> ■



Above: Wendell Berry (L) and the author's father, Dr. Guy Wilcox (R), SOM Class of 1972, after the Gheens lecture."

Reflections on Cultural Competency Day

by Ben Belknap, MS¹ and Allison Wilcox, MS²

The 7th annual Cultural Competency Day was held on September 27th for UofL graduate health sciences students. As with years past, the day was designed to expose students to cultural diversity that they may not be familiar with, particularly the richness of diversity here in Kentucky. The morning got off to a powerful start, as singers from St. Stephen's Baptist Church gave an emotional performance, sharing songs and skits that reflect their beliefs and struggles.

Throughout the rest of the day, students attended breakout sessions to listen to and engage with fellow Kentuckians who offered to share about their personal cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Student members of the Medical Humanities and Social Justice group at UofL led a new breakout session this year that sought to engage students in their personal beliefs and experiences encountering diversity. During these sessions students discussed their unique perspectives on interacting with patients whose lives and backgrounds are starkly different from their own. They also addressed whether there is a difference between generalities used in medicine to characterize the types of patients who are at risk for certain diseases, compared to stereotypes that are more often disparaging than constructive.

A favorite breakout session for students continues to be the session about the Old Order Mennonite community in Kentucky. Mr. Kraly, a gray-bearded elder, spoke of the social dynamics involved in "how we (the Old Order Mennonite and Amish) look at medical care and how medical care looks at us," highlighting some of the common complications that a provider may encounter as well as success stories of mutual cooperation and healing. He stated that his Old Order community, the most conservative sect under the Mennonite Church,

was "very cautious" concerning the advanced medical technology commonly used today, saying that illness is a "part of God's will" and that "unreasonable measures to prolong life without improving it" is not appealing to those in his community. However, Mr. Kraly then clarified that any treatment or procedure, barring a heart transplant, they would consider as long there was a "reasonable assurance of success." This is contrary to some of the common beliefs voiced by those in medicine that all Mennonites are forbidden from receiving any surgeries, blood transfusions, or immunizations. In reality, restrictions vary greatly from community to community according to the rules laid down by their councils. Students like Hannah Bennett (SOM class of 2016) found the Mennonite session interesting and beneficial to her understanding of these largely isolated communities and their beliefs about medical care. Hannah is from Central Kentucky and she hopes to one day have Mennonite patients entrust her with their care.

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Reserving a day in the curriculum to explore the social issues so intimately intertwined in the practice of medicine is a unique opportunity for UofL students. The goals of Cultural Competency day are met when students like Hannah learn more about a portion of society with distinct views on medicine, thus equipping them with a broader perspective for a future working with a wide range of demographics. This is part of UofL's commitment to producing the best healthcare professionals who will practice compassion and respect for others.

For more information about Cultural Competency Day and "SOM Diversity", please visit <http://louisville.edu/medschool/diversity/SOM-%20Diversity/cultural-competency-workshops.html>

