

Center for Ethics and Humanities



in the Life Sciences

Fall 2009 Brown Bag Series

Informal Presentation & Discussion
Faculty & Students Welcome
Coffee, juice, and snacks

bioethics.msu.edu

MICHIGAN STATE
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Please join us for a noon Brown Bag

Pandemic Flu Preparedness and the Uses of Narrative

In 2008, the Centers for Disease Control launched a new addition to its pandemicflu.gov website, an online 'Storybook' of first-person narratives about the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic. The collection is presented as a resource tool for certified Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication trainers and trainees, to help planners re-energize their efforts and fight preparedness fatigue and apathy. My talk examines the implications of the CDC's instrumental framing of these stories and, comparing them to recent fictional accounts of the 1918 pandemic, will suggest that a more informed and critical approach to narrative might be more effective, not just in resisting apathy, but in apprehending anticipated pandemics more fully as speculative fictions, as imaginary events that nonetheless have profound real-world implications. In the context of public health efforts to use scientific studies and quantified probabilities to discredit popular narratives about health and health care - for example, those linking MMR vaccination causally to autism - the CDC storybook opens up a place for medical humanities scholarship to contribute to a more fruitful integration of narrative and its theories into encounters between public health and the popular imagination.

Catherine Belling, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Medical Humanities and Bioethics at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. Her PhD is in English; her focus on narrative and medical knowledge. Her current research explores narrative approaches to hypochondria. Her work has been published in *Literature and Medicine*, the *Journal of Medical Humanities*, the *Journal of Clinical Ethics*, and *Academic Medicine*. In 2005-2006, she was Program Co-Chair for the annual meeting of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH). In 2007 she was elected to the ASBH Board of Directors.

Wednesday, November 11 • 12:00 Noon
C-102 East Fee Hall