

Gauntlet News - Canada's forgotten medical past

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The University of Calgary shed light on many unheard-of medical topics this month after embarking on its 18th annual History of Medicine Days conference called "Evolution, Genetics and Eugenics: The Misuse of Biological Theory, 1900-1945, Lessons from the Past."

The two-day conference was held in the Libin Theater of the Health Sciences Centre on March 6 and 7. Leading experts and university students discussed the classics of Ancient Greece and Rome, Canadiana, eugenics, military medicine, public health, surgery, diseases, sex and gender, media and public perception of medicine.

Community health sciences and history associate professor Dr. Frank Stahnisch said the purpose of the event was to blend the diverse knowledge and backgrounds of medical students into a formal lecture series.

"I think it has shown not only a deep interest in the interdisciplinary field of medicine and health care from a historical perspective, but it also has shown how much research is possible already at an undergraduate and post-graduate level," said Stahnisch who was the conference chair of the event.

The conference highlighted the installation project of architecture students who had designed a pathogen through historical research.

An awards banquet was held on the last day in the Last Defence Lounge. Awards were presented to student guest speakers as well as two groups who presented on classics and Canadiana.

The topic of eugenics was explained more thoroughly on the first day. Stahnisch said the eugenics session discussed the role of medicine in the Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act which was enacted by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in 1928.

"Those ethics that made eugenics possible have to really be looked at in their historical context," said Stahnisch. "There was a major point made that even though Alberta and Saskatchewan, for example, were so close to each other, there are very important differences between the provinces and orders that can explain why there are differences in people's receptiveness towards eugenics issues."

Marnie Cudmore, history of medicine and health care conference co-ordinator, thought the conference was a great way for different students and experts to exchange ideas.

"[The conference] really took on a broad spectrum this year as far as the interest in the history of medicine," said Cudmore. "We actually accepted people from almost every category to whom we invited and across Canada."

She added that full copies of the lecturers' manuscripts and abstracts can be read in a book called The Proceedings of the 18th Annual History of Medicine Days.

According to Cudmore, the conference attracted a fair volume of people. Approximately 125 people listened to keynote speaker Dr. Garland E. Allen, professor of biology and history of biology. Individual sessions attracted audiences of 60 to 75 people.

"[People] love the interaction from people of other universities throughout Canada and I think it is

quite a unique talk that has grown over the years," said Cudmore.

The conference is held every year in March.

Correction: The original version of this story included incorrect information regarding the cost of attending the event: costs \$30 for the general public and \$20 for students. The Gauntlet apologizes for any confusion.

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