

DEALING WITH MEDICAL UNCERTAINTY IN THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY AROUND 1900

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Even if the continuously succeeding breakthroughs in medical science never will be able to take away uncertainty completely in clinical decision making and therapeutic treatments, the risks of an insufficient degree of tolerance of ambiguity are well known and therefore there is general agreement about the need of more attention for it in the curriculum. However, how to realise this ambition is much less clear. This presentation is part of a larger project addressing this shortcoming, through a strong interdisciplinary approach, yet starting primarily from a historical orientation. It explores the history of changing attitudes towards medical uncertainty in the training of (primary care) physicians from the 1880s up to the present day.

Even though courses on the 'encyclopaedia and history of medicine' continued to be offered at many European universities after the reforms around 1800, their position was increasingly questioned from the middle of the nineteenth century in result of the gradual scientification of medical education in the laboratories. History of medicine was no longer considered to be sufficiently useful. However, during the late nineteenth century similar kind of courses were reintroduced precisely to compensate for what was considered a too one-sided (natural) scientific approach. In this presentation we will study the main motivations for the existence of these humanistic courses within the medical programme in several European countries - indeed often following the example of leading German universities - and ask to what extent and in which way they were implicitly or even explicitly used as an answer to medical ambiguity, as well as why they disappeared from the programme in Finland from the beginning of the twentieth century despite the overwhelming German orientation of Finnish academia in general.

History of Universities Seminar

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