Introduction to Medical Anthropology

Course Number: 115  
Semester: Spring  
Year: 2015  
Location: 160 Kroeber  
Instructor: Cohen  
Units: 4  
Time: TuTh 3:30-5:00  
CCN: 02681

The politics and culture of health, illness, and disease today

What is the future of Ebola? How is this disease conceptualized and governed, and what forms of analysis of the events of recent months might help us better understand the current situation and address its future? How do we understand health care and disease more broadly, under current conditions of wealth and health disparities in the United States and worldwide? How might we think about the relation of health to transformations in labor and access to food and medicine, to the government of migration, and to the care of individuals and populations?

As psychiatry comes to play a greater role in the management of political and everyday violence, of mobility and migration, and of immobility and rural poverty, how do we reconceptualize our understandings of normality and of madness? What is medical anthropology and how have its practitioners attempted to make sense of these questions and earlier ones? What tools have they developed and what needs to be done to rethink the field today? This course has three parts. The first, *The manufacture of a subdiscipline*, examines the history of medical anthropology and sociology over the second half of the twentieth century, focusing on international development, on the rise of human rights and humanitarian institutions, and on the ways classic social theory is deployed by experts over this period, and argues for a critical shift over this period in how the study of medicine worldwide conceives of time and of the global.

The second, *Ebola*, addresses several emerging concerns around this disease and efforts by anthropologists, clinicians, politicians, and others to think and to act. The third, *Trauma, migration, informality, poverty, and psychiatry*, addresses shifting relations between psychiatry, capital, information, the mobility and immobility of populations, and the transformation of the state. It is organized around the rethinking of a concept, *informality*, in relation to health, disease, and government today.

Students will be responsible for three projects: a group project on classic theory in the discipline that combines fieldwork in the Bay Area and library research; a group project on Ebola that does in depth research on one area of emergent concern; and an individual research paper that addresses some aspect of medicine and informality: from illegal migration to addiction to non-standard therapies to the politics of slums to the government of populations without formal rights. There are no prerequisites though some background in anthropology or sociology, biology, public health, or social welfare is of course useful. The course has 2 lectures per week and a section.