# Personifying Medical Humanities:

## An Integrative Approach to Medicine, Marriage, and a Maturing Population

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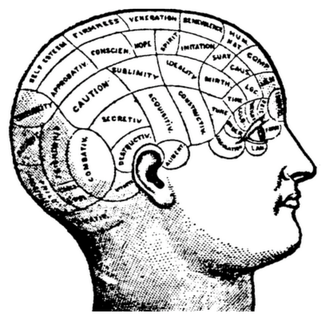
### *Medical Humanities*

**Defined by New York University School of Medicine as "an interdisciplinary field of humanities, social science, and the arts and their application to medical education and practice." The introduction of the "humanities and arts provide insight into the human condition, suffering, personhood, our responsibility to each other, and offer a historical perspective on medical practice."**

Applied science is providing ever-increasing insight into human biology. Average life expectancy is longer than ever but despite such progress, our healthcare system lacks emphasis on "quality of life," which is reflected in its impersonal, often de-humanizing system. Medical Humanities uses the arts and social sciences as a window into humanity, providing a more integral approach to medicine and overall wellbeing. With literature, religion, psychology, sociology, film, and visual arts as just some of its many parts, Medical Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that widens the perspective of what it means to be sick and more importantly, what it means to be well.



*A traditional phrenology chart, a popular image associated with Medical Humanities to represent the association between biology and the humanities*

### The Work and Life of Dr. Evan Calkins and Dr. Virginia Calkins

**Meet Dr. Evan Calkins.**
Former Chief of Medicine at Buffalo General Hospital and Chair of Medicine for The University at Buffalo, Dr. Calkins is best well known for his work in Geriatrics. Despite some resistance, Calkins created one of the top Geriatrics programs in the country and even more impressively, a unique comprehensive health care model for the aging population.

*"He does more than treat them when they are ill; he is the objective witness of their lives." -John Berger*

**Network in Aging of Western NY, Inc.**

Established in 1981, Network is Aging is the product of various community services, three hospitals (Buffalo General, E.J. Meyer Memorial Hospital, and Buffalo VA), and a great deal of respect for the quality of life of the aging populations of WNY.

Membership Includes:
- Educations
- Health and Social Service Professionals
- Community Leaders
- Government Agencies
- Business People

This interdisciplinary program is more than medicine, it's a resource for those who work with and for the aging, to provide more comprehensive and complete care. Just as medical humanities utilizes a complete look at personhood, Network in Aging combines multiple aspects of the aging process to give the best care possible.

**Meet Dr. Virginia Brady Calkins.** A graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School, Dr. Calkins split her time between practicing medicine and raising a family. Virginia became a staff physician at Gowanda Correctional Facility, where she soon realized the importance of communication in health care. She likened the experience more to veterinary medicine, her first career choice, because of the lack of information she received from her patients.

**More than Medicine.** Despite their dedication to work, Evan and Virginia devoted time to an active life outside of medicine.

Raising their nine children on their eighteen-acre farm in Hamburg, NY, allowed them to keep their large family busy. Simultaneously, it allowed the Calkins to instill values of responsibility and hard work, which had been instilled in them by their parents, to their own five boys and four girls.

On their own, Evan enjoys sailing his twenty-three-foot sloop, which he often mans himself and was a member of numerous medical societies such as the Association of American Physicians and The Gross Medical Society of which he was president. He enjoys such composers as Beethoven and Rachmaninov, classics by Mark Twain and Microbe Hunters by Paul D. Kreuf, which inspired him to become a physician.

Virginia spent much of her time training her poodles in agility courses, which was enjoyed both by her and the dogs. Her favorite composers are Tchaikovski, Smetana, Hanson and the author, Dick Francis.

### *An Example Life*

Medical Humanities has the ability to transform medicine and the way in which it is practiced.

The story of the Calkins family is a story of what Medical Humanities can be. It's a balance of work and life, biological theories and humanist principles.

There is no better reflection of this than their nine highly successful children, their forty grandchildren, their success in practicing medicine and their number of healthy and happy years.

*"We work in gaps: between the real and the idea; between the mystery and mastery; between molecules and meaning - between the scientific/technological world of medicine and the power of the human spirit in healing." -University of Texas, Health Science Center at Houston*

### *Relevant Research*

**Literature and Medicine**

Research suggests that education of medical ethics must become more "literary" for medical practitioners to become better versed in a wide "range of moral experience," and therefore be more successful in dealing with both physical and psychological matters. The use of literature that centers on the experience of patients, caregivers, and medical personal is used to prime the reader for similar experiences and interactions.

*"Absent a sense of what matters to people before they get sick and after they get well, the best efforts of physicians to heal the sick are likely to be morally compromised and, especially in cases of chronic illness and disability, therapeutically ineffective as well." -Ronald A. Carson*

**Sociology and Medicine**

Family medicine is not just about treating the individual members, but treating the patients within the context of the family unit and larger social contexts.

Understanding family medicine through the "life course paradigm," allows the physician to see the patient as part of the whole and understand their social roles within it.

**Religion and Medicine**

Research suggest that overall, Religion and Spirituality have a positive effect on both physical and mental health.

Those who considered themselves religious reported lower levels of heart disease, chronic pain, and higher levels of positive health habits, and longevity.

Religious variables such as prayer, social support, and relationship with God were measured and were found to have a positive correlation with well-being and general psychological functioning.

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