

Call for Papers: *Complaining about Medicine, c.1700-2000*

History of Medicine Unit, University of Birmingham, UK

(Dr Jonathan Reinarz, Director)

2-3 November 2012

Keynote Speakers: Professor Andrew Scull (University of California, San Diego), **Professor John Clarke** (Open University), **Dr Alex Mold** (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)

In recent years, studies into experiences of health care have led historians to engage with the issue of the medical complaint. As expressions of dissatisfaction, disquiet and failings in service provision, the complaint is both a vital antidote to progressive histories of health care and, in generating contemporary investigation and debate, has also left a fertile seam for historical research. Often it is only when things go wrong that we begin to understand the complexity at work in past events. This two-day international conference will explore what has happened historically when medicine generated complaints.

Amidst the opening salvos of the mechanism/animism debate at the start of the eighteenth century, medical men complained about each other and their theories, and those outside this professional circle denounced the pointless barbarity of medical experiments and techniques. As the Enlightenment blossomed, traditional treatments were challenged by empirical knowledge, by Western therapeutics and by patients' complaints – at least until, in the nineteenth century, professional licensing and standards were formalised against a backdrop of mixed health care provision. Even then, complaining about medicine proliferated, with patient advocacy, consumerism and pressure groups directing the path of practice in the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first with the controversy surrounding, for example, the MMR vaccine. This conference seeks to address how each of these aspects of the medical complaint – between sciences, professions, practitioners and sectors; within politics, ethics and regulatory bodies; across nations and cultures; from interested parties and patients – has manifested in modern medicine, c.1700-2000, how it has been dealt with and how it was resolved, if at all.

Papers are encouraged from all disciplines, including ethics and the medical humanities. Proposals are sought for physical, mental and emotional medicine and healing. It is anticipated that topics will encompass, but will not be restricted, to the following:

- Grievances between medical practitioners
- Criticism of medical innovation and pioneers, new techniques, syndromes or disease classifications
- Conflict between humoral/herbal/complementary and modernising/mainstream/Western medicine
- Objections to legislation and policy; its absence, drafting, application and workability
- Complaints about public health conception and measures
- Tensions within the mixed economy of health care
- Whistleblowers and trade union intervention
- Protests from, or on behalf of, patients, service users, their families and/or advocates
- Objections to self-help and self-medication
- The impact of professionalisation/professional bodies and the legal profession on medical and ethical standards
- Complaint resolution in closed institutional/organisational settings
- Complaints as agents of change
- Conciliation practices in the public sphere or individual communities and institutions
- Apologies, official and informal, and their reception

Proposals are invited for individual papers of 20 minutes; panel submissions of 3 papers will also be considered favourably. Limited travel assistance may be available for unsupported post-graduate speakers and those on a low income. Abstracts should be a maximum of 300 words in length and should be submitted to Dr Rebecca Wynter (r.i.wynter@bham.ac.uk) no later than **23 April 2012**.

