

CFP

**COVID-19 BEYOND BORDERS:
RETHINKING MEDICAL HUMANITIES AT THE FRONTLINES****6.-9. JULY 2021, UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

This conference explores the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on borders. In most Western countries, borders have seemingly disappeared or become permeable to facilitate global mobility and the circularity of goods. With countries limiting nonessential travel and closing their borders to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus, national borders have re-emerged as confining realities. As the Polish Nobel Prize winner Olga Tokarczuk has poignantly put it, “the virus reminds us: borders exist, and they’re doing just fine.” At the same time, experts across science and politics have repeatedly emphasized that the “the virus knows no borders,” seeking to emphasize that COVID-19 is an infectious disease that can travel around the world at unprecedented speed and with no respect for national frontiers.

And yet, it is national, social and cultural borders, borders between generations and risk groups that can explain why COVID-19 has been confronted differently across countries, cultures and societies. These borders exist, even if the practice of medicine itself has long been defined by the goal to transcend them. From the World Health Organization’s “Health for All” to *Médecins sans frontières* and the European Commission’s Policy “Care Across Borders”, public health initiatives have sought to overcome the very borders that COVID-19 has brought to our renewed attention.

The impacts of the pandemic and of public health measures undertaken to stop its spread have made clear that the Medical Humanities have a key role to play when it comes to making visible the invisible borders accentuated by COVID-19. Historically, the Medical Humanities have always inhabited borderlands and operated between disciplines as well as mediated between theory and practice. In the light of COVID-19, Kirsten Ostherr has called for the formation of “translational humanities”, highlighting that we need a collaborative research culture that “transcends disciplinary boundaries” and “can contribute to the frontline response”. In the light of this, we invite proposals for 20-minute presentations from scholars and practitioners from a range of disciplinary fields associated with the Medical Humanities that explore the role the humanities can play in transcending borders of knowledge and making visible the multiform borders created and accentuated by COVID-19.

The organizing committee, Prof. Dr. Monika Pietrzak-Franger (University of Vienna), Prof. Dr. Anna Elsner (University of St. Gallen), Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schütz (Medical University of Vienna), Dr. Felicitas Seebacher (ÖAW), invites papers that may include, but are not limited to, the following kinds of emphasis:

- Medical Humanities at the frontlines – the aims, functions and practices that are needed
- Medical Humanities in times of COVID-19 – the role of Medical Humanities in times of global pandemics – what can Humanities do?
- Borders in Medical Humanities – disciplinary, methodological, ideological
- Medical Humanities beyond the Anglo-American world
- Global pandemics and local interventions – (comparative) look at care provision and policies in different countries

- COVID-19 across media borders – (new, social) media, pandemics and discrimination
- Borders in healthcare – national, social, economic, material, ideological

Please email proposals (300 words) together with your bios (150 words) to Monika Pietrzak-Franger monika.pietrzak-franger@univie.ac.at and Anna Elsner anna.elsner@unisg.ch, by **15 October 2020**. Please send us the email with the subject: “**Abstract Medical Humanities**”

Considering the uncertain times we live in, we are planning to go online or go hybrid in case international travel is not yet possible.