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WITNESSING AIDS IN 1980s AMERICA: THE DOCTORS’ PERSPECTIVES

A TALK BY

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Much has been written by and about AIDS patients and their families and friends, especially in the first years of AIDS after its emergence in early 1981. This talk, however, will examine AIDS from the literary perspective of American physicians, who were fighting an epidemic with no cure available and who strongly had to question their role as caregivers and healers. Doctors had to cope with death as a constant companion to an illness that was highly stigmatized and denied by society. A new set of ethical problems arose, with often crucial decisions regarding life-sustaining treatment in patients with AIDS, testing new medicine or stepping forward when colleagues refused to treat a patient. As will be shown in a selection of autobiographical accounts, doctor-patient relationships were extraordinary in this period, concentrating mainly on the amelioration of the quality of life and healing of the subjective troubles of one’s patients.

Mag. Lucia Blasl is currently a research and teaching assistant in the Department of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck as well as a graduate student at Innsbruck Medical University. Her current research project in connection with her PhD thesis is on humanistic behavior and values in medical students and doctors as expressed in autobiographical writings by medical professionals.

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