Media Reviews

Teaching and Researching the History of Medicine in the Era of (Big) Data: Introduction

Despite ample rhetoric about the utility of new digital methods that have emerged from the Digital Humanities, it remains difficult to understand exactly how and when various methods can be applied to research and teaching. What kinds of projects can benefit from digital methods? How can one tell which methods are most appropriate for which sources? What are the pros and cons of various tools and software? Are new methods really worth the investment of time and energy? Especially in the case of medical history, real-world examples of digital scholarship that can provide answers to these questions can seem elusive.

On 30 April 2016, in a panel at the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine, scholars gathered to address these timely issues and questions, and to embrace the opportunity to work together to help define a path forward for the history of medicine field as it faces an ever-greater digital world and intersects increasingly with the Digital Humanities. The reviews in this volume of *Medical History*, and those that will follow in the next two volumes, reflect the proceedings of this panel, which consisted of a variety of engaging case studies, including a semantic network analysis of the linguistic contexts in which the definition of 'nutrition' developed, an unusually high-level view of how doctors perceived and discussed influenza across thirty different American newspapers, as well as new ways in which digital methods can and should be integrated into the history of medicine classroom.

In addition to two panels worth of papers being compressed into a single lunch session, further time constraints meant that presenters were not able to present full versions of their respective papers. Nonetheless, the presentations collectively facilitated a lively interchange among the presenters and with the large and diverse audience, addressing key methodological questions about how best to bridge traditional and digital methods in the history of medicine. These published proceedings offer more detail of the case studies, and they advance for a broader audience the productive conversation about the utility, application and execution of digital methods in the history of medicine.

Medical historians have long grappled with ways in which physicians have continually adopted, appropriated and transformed medical (and non-medical) technologies for the betterment (and at times the detriment) of their craft. We must apply the same kind of scrutiny to our own practices and technologies, neither adopting new methods for the sake of change, nor ignoring them out of allegiance to tradition. These reviews and case studies are not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, we hope these examples contribute to, and indeed provoke, a broader continuum of programmes and conversations about the state and direction of the history of medicine field in the twenty-first century.

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