

**Call for Conference Participation, Aarhus University, 1–2 June 2026**

## **Illness Narrative Retold – Diversity, Temporality, and Digitization**

### **Keynotes and provisional titles**

- Angela Woods, Professor of Medical Humanities, Durham University: “Voice and Testimony in the Age of Generative AI”
- Danielle Spencer, Senior Lecturer, Columbia University Narrative Medicine Programme: “Metagnosis: Illness Narratives and Knowledges Retold”
- Stefania Vicari, Senior Lecturer in Digital Sociology, University of Sheffield: “Social Media of Health and Illness: Platform, Narratives and Values”

### **Invited speakers for panels on gender, crip narratives, mental illness, and medical humanities**

- Ida Melander, Senior Lecturer, Örebro University
- Maria Bee Christensen-Strynø, Associate Professor, University of Southern Denmark
- Karen Hvidtfeldt, Professor, University of Southern Denmark
- Katarina Bernhardsson, Associate Professor, Lund University
- Peter Simonsen, Professor, University of Southern Denmark
- Nora Simonhjell, Professor, University of Agder
- Jane Ege Møller, Associate Professor, Aarhus University
- Lasse Raaby Gammelgaard, Associate Professor, Aarhus University
- Anders Juhl Rasmussen, Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen

Stories of illness are often understood as attempts to tame, navigate, and make sense of the ‘wreckage’ or ‘biographical disruption’ that the experience of serious illness or patienthood may occasion. Within illness narrative research, the storyteller is seen as a seriously wounded individual trying to master the disruptive existential event of falling ill – frequently with the (sometimes impossible) hope of restoring health. This dominant “crisis model” has shaped scholarly assumptions about what an illness narrative is, who can tell it, and for what reasons, as well as how to approach it analytically.

Against the background of this well-established tradition, this two-day interdisciplinary conference asks the key questions of where the academic field of illness narrative research is currently moving and how new experiences, discourses, mediations, and technologies shape the way illness narratives are told today. In other words, we wish to explore the multiplicity of ways in which illness narratives are currently understood, articulated, circulated, and used.

The conference particularly focuses on how new ideas, practices, and configurations of illness narratives emerge in cultural contexts shaped by anticipatory health technologies and the growing prevalence of chronic conditions, neurodiversity, mental illness, and increased medicalization. How are illness narratives crafted and shared if suffering is not only an acute and dramatic event but also

something that lingers, changes from day to day, or looms as a potential future? What does it mean when illness and health become increasingly entangled and difficult to separate, when the narrator is not a patient in any conventional sense, or when diagnoses are replaced by risks and probabilities?

Another focus area for the conference is the public circulation of illness narratives on social media, in broadcast media, and on streaming platforms, which turn individual stories of illness and suffering into public concerns and raise the question of story ownership. This concern is also pertinent in forms of distributed storytelling where experiences and narratives are shared across, e.g., families, generations, and intimate relations. In this vein, we also welcome papers that investigate how illness narratives are told by multiple narrators, by relatives, or by (genetically) at-risk subjects entangled in family histories of pain. Furthermore, we encourage contributions focusing on critical approaches to the metaphors or narrative templates involved in telling illness narratives, and on how illness narratives are increasingly deployed in professional contexts (e.g., health education) or as creative tools to foster community-building (e.g., in creative patient writing).

We invite contributions that address but are not limited to the following themes:

- Critical approaches to illness narratives
- Chronic illness
- Mental illness
- Illness narratives on (genetic) risk and risk technologies
- Disability and crip narratives
- Neurodivergence as illness narrative
- Contested illness narratives
- Illness narratives and epidemics
- Illness and story ownership
- Gender and illness narrative
- Metaphors in illness narratives
- Temporality
- Invisible illness
- Shared, collective, or distributed illness narratives
- Visuality in illness narratives (e.g., graphic novels, zines)
- Illness narratives in journalism and legacy media
- The role of social media, online communities, and digital platforms in shaping and circulating illness narratives
- Illness narratives as tools of professional or organisational learning
- Creative writing and illness narrative
- Collaborations between academics and practitioners in understanding the importance of illness narratives
- Illness narratives told by health professionals
- Illness narratives told by, through, or with relatives

## Practical information

- Conference dates: 1–2 June 2026
- Abstract submission deadline: 01 February 2026
- Notification of acceptance: 15 February 2026
- Individual papers: Send a title, abstract (300 words), and bio (100 words) to [noraksn@cc.au.dk](mailto:noraksn@cc.au.dk).
- Panels: Send panel title and description (300 words) with abstracts for each paper (300 words per paper) and bios for each participant (100 words per speaker) to [noraksn@cc.au.dk](mailto:noraksn@cc.au.dk). Maximum of four papers per panel.
- Conference fee: The final conference fee will be announced after the abstract-submission deadline. Thanks to project funding, only a symbolic participation fee will be charged, estimated at approximately 75 euro.
- Organisers: Professor Carsten Stage and Assistant Professor Ann-Katrine Schmidt Nielsen
- Funding: The conference is funded by the research project Genetic hauntings. Pre-patient narratives in the era of direct-to-consumer genetic testing (IRDF 2023–2026).

If you are joining the conference, please also consider attending the large ISSN-conference in Aarhus later that week. It is organised by our great colleagues at the School of Communication and Culture, AU: <https://conferences.au.dk/narrative2026>

## Keynote bios

### Angela Woods

Woods is Professor and medical humanities researcher with research interests and expertise spanning three linked areas: the interplay between clinical, experiential and cultural-theoretical accounts of voice-hearing and psychosis; narrative and its role in understanding health; and the dynamics of interdisciplinary and collaborative research. She is the Director of Durham's Institute for Medical Humanities and the Director of the Discovery Research Platform for Medical Humanities, funded by the Wellcome Trust (2023-2030). From 2012-2022 she was Co-Director of Hearing the Voice, a decade-long interdisciplinary study of voice-hearing also funded by the Wellcome Trust.



## Danielle Spencer

Spencer, Ph.D., is a faculty member in the Columbia University Narrative Medicine Graduate Program. Author of *Metagnosis: Revelatory Narratives of Health and Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2021) and co-author of Perkins-Prize-winning *The Principles and Practice of Narrative Medicine* (OUP, 2017), her scholarly and creative work appears in diverse outlets, from *The Lancet* to *Ploughshares*. Spencer's research interests include retrospective diagnosis, narrative ethics, and illness narratives. She is the Editor of the Anthem Studies in Narrative and Health Humanities book series, an Associate Editor of *Literature and Medicine*. [www.daniellespencer.com](http://www.daniellespencer.com)



## Stefania Vicari

Vicari is Senior Lecturer in Digital Sociology at the University of Sheffield and a research lead at Sheffield Cancer Research. Her work investigates social media practices and their intersections with advocacy, activism and lived experiences of health and illness. Her research has been funded by the British Academy (2012), Wellcome Trust (2013; 2016), Leverhulme Trust (2022) and UK Research and Innovation (2018, 2025). She is an Associate Editor of *Information, Communication & Society* and the author of *Digital Media and Participatory Cultures of Health and Illness* (Routledge, 2021).

