The History of Women in Medicine

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Course Description
Much has been made of sex and gender differences in medicine and the particularities of women’s experiences as patients and healthcare practitioners. However, people have not always understood the significance of sex and gender differences for medical knowledge and practice in the same way they do today. This course will explore how ideas about the significance of these differences have changed over time due to a confluence of scientific, socio-cultural, and political factors. Focusing on the U.S., this course looks at the complexity of sex and gender as relevant categories in medicine, and the ways women have mobilized their gender identity in their activities as practitioners, activists, and patients. In doing so, it draws out several themes in the history of women in American medicine, including the heavy focus on reproductive potential; struggles for autonomy and agency; and the intersection of race, class, and gender.

Learning Objectives
1. Understand how ideas about the significance of sex and gender difference in medicine have changed over time
2. Understand how women have mobilized their identities in their experiences as patients, practitioners, and activists
3. Elaborate central themes in the history of women’s participation in medicine

Course Calendar
Week 1: Sex, Gender, and Difference in Medicine: An Historical Perspective

Week 2: Technology and the Medicalization of Reproduction
Readings: L. Freidenfelds, “Examining technology’s effect on early pregnancy detection” radio segment (2013); J. Wolf, “Risk and reputation: obstetricians, cesareans, and consent,” JHMAS (2017); Historical images of reproductive tools

Week 3: Race, Class, and Gender

Week 4: Women as Healthcare Practitioners

Week 5: Women’s Health Activism

Week 6: Women as Patients: Contemporary Perspectives from Cedars-Sinai
Guest Lecture/Panel: TBD (Cedars-Sinai)
Readings: Selections from J. Virdi, “Painful realities,” Wellcome Collection Blog,
https://wellcomecollection.org/series/XTg5pRAAACUAP5U5