IAMMC CONFERENCE 2025 | INGOLSTADT

MATERIAL MATTERS

Powerful Objects in Medical Museums and Collections

10-13 SEPTEMBER 2025

IAMMC

International Association of
Medical Museums and Collections

Deutsches
Medizinhistorisches Museum

PRE-CONFERENCE INGOLSTADT 9 – 10 SEPTEMBER

INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP ON MEDICAL WAX MODELS (IWWM)

Venue: **Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum Ingolstadt**
German Museum for the History of Medicine
Anatomiestraße 18-20 | 85049 Ingolstadt

Programme and further information:
www.moulagen.uzh.ch/en/IWWM

WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2025

LOCATION: **Volkshochschule Ingolstadt** | conference venue
Hallstraße 5, Ingolstadt

16.00 – 17.00 **Registration** and welcome coffee / tea

17.00 – 17.30 **Welcoming Speeches**
Dr. Dorothea Deneke-Stoll
Mayor of the City of Ingolstadt

Prof. Dr. Marion Maria Ruisinger
Director of the *Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum*
German Museum for the History of Medicine

from 18.00 **Welcome Reception** at the German Museum for the History of Medicine, Anatomiestraße 18 (Exhibitions open until 23.00)

20.00 & 21.00 **Meet the Artist** in the German Museum for the History of Medicine
Katharina Sabernig (Vienna), artist and physician, presents her current exhibition "Knitted Anatomy"

IAMMC CONFERENCE

WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2025

14.00 – 15.00 **OPTIONAL GUIDED TOURS** (60 min.)

1. **Permanent exhibition** in the German Museum for the History of Medicine
   Anatomiestraße 18 | Meeting point: Foyer
2. **Temporary exhibition** "Heart of the Matter. Human Specimens in the Museum"
   German Museum for the History of Medicine (guide: Thomas Schnalke)
   Anatomiestraße 18 | Meeting point: Foyer
3. **Bavarian Army Museum** in the "Neues Schloss" (guide: Tobias Schönauer)
   Paradeplatz 4 | Meeting point: Foyer
4. **Ingolstadt city tour** | *the tour ends at the conference venue, Hallstraße 5*
   Meeting point: Altes Rathaus (Old City Hall), Rathausplatz 2

THURSDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2025

LOCATION: **Volkshochschule Ingolstadt** | conference venue
Hallstraße 5, Ingolstadt

09.00 – 10.30 **SESSION 1: THE POWER OF THE SINGLE OBJECT**
Chair: Shelley McKellar (Western University, London / Canada)

One Thing at a Time: The power of individual objects in an era of overload
Ken Arnold (Medical Museion, Copenhagen)

The Cholera Bottle:
Connecting Past and Present Understandings of Disease Materialities
Karin Tybjerg (Medical Museion, Copenhagen)
Eva Åhrén (Karolinska Institute, Stockholm)

The Archive Chest. A Witness of 362 Years of Continuity of Sweden's Model of Central Government of Health Care
Kjell Asplund (Umeå University)

10.30 – 11.00 **Coffee / tea**

11.00 – 12.30 **SESSION 2: OBJECTS FOR LEARNING**

Chair: Ken Arnold (Medical Museion, Copenhagen)

Materiality and Teaching:
Transformation of Anatomical Eye Models from the 17th to the 20th Century

Lisa Woop (Deutsches Optisches Museum, Jena)

The "Laryngo-Fantome" of Carlo Labus.
A Precious Teaching Tool with Great Evocative Power

Maria Carla Garbarino ('Camillo Golgi' Museum, Pavia)
Paolo Mazzarello (Kosmos Museum of Natural History, Pavia)
Fabio Pagella (University of Pavia)
Alessandro Porro (University of Milan)

The Glass Man in Tashkent:
A Revolutionary Model of Medical Education in the USSR

Katarzyna Jarosz (Wrocław University)

12.30 – 13.30 **Lunch**

13.30 – 15.00 **MUSEUM SLAM**

Chair: Eva Åhrén (Karolinska Institute, Stockholm)

PART I: MEET THE MUSEUM

Anatomy and Pathological Anatomy Heritage Collections
University of Strasbourg

Tricia Close-Koenig

Musea Brugge | Brugge

Guenevere Souffreau

The War Heritage Institute | Brussels

Zoë-Joy Vangansewinkel / Saskia Van de Voorde

Graphical Arts Collection "Humanity and Death" | University of Düsseldorf

Luisa Rittershaus

Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History | Melbourne, Australia

Veronica Dominiak

The Hamburg Medical History Museum | UKE Hamburg

Henrik Eßler

Medical History Collection | Ruhr-University Bochum

Leo Weiß

The Medical and Pathological Dupuytren collections | Sorbonne University, Paris

Eloïse Quétel

Human Remains Archives | University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

Neave Anne Geoghegan

Museum of Human Anatomy and Physical Anthropology | Matanzas, Cuba

Sandra Bahr Ulloa

Gülhane Medical History Museum | Koç University, Ankara

İrem Alpay

PART II: MEET THE OBJECT

René Laënnec's Stethoscope

Kerstin Hulter Åsberg (Medical History Museum, Uppsala)

Physick's Tonsil Guillotine

Shelley McKellar (Western University, London, Canada)

Instruments for Ovaroclasia (1888)

Lucie Biehler-Gomez (University of Milan)
Bruno Falconi (University of Brescia)
Paolo Maria Galimberti (Milano)
Alessandro Porro (University of Milan)

Hat of a Renowned Surgeon

Magdalena Czartoryjska Meier (Lausanne University Hospital)

A Block of Margarine

Malthe Kouassi Bjerregaard (Medical Museion, Copenhagen)

15.00 – 15.30 **Coffee / tea**

15.30 – 17.00 **SESSION 3: GENERATORS OF ENQUIRY**

Chair: Mieneke te Hennepe (Museum Boerhaave, Leiden)

"Some photos to remind you of the growth of your baby":
Catherine Chisholm's Photograph Album and the Ethics of Photographic Display

Harriet Palfreyman (Museum of Medicine and Health, University of Manchester)
Stephanie Seville (Museum of Medicine and Health, University of Manchester)

The Guest Book
A Key Object Bearing Evidence of Transnational Knowledge Exchange

Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz (Medical History Museum, Gothenburg)

Rudolf Schmitt and the 'Lost' *Museum des Kindes* (ca. 1932)

Patti Gaal-Holmes (Arts University Bournemouth)

18.00 **Conference Dinner / Bavarian Evening**

Location: Kastaniengarten, Gutsstraße 4, Ingolstadt-Oberhaunstadt
Meeting point bus transfer: Schutterstraße/Tränktorstraße (Hotel Anker)

FRIDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2025

LOCATION: **Volkshochschule Ingolstadt** | Hallstraße 5, Ingolstadt

9.30 – 11.00 **SESSION 4: OBJECTS AND HAZARDS**

Chair: Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz (Medical History Museum, Gothenburg)

From 'Terrible' to 'Magnificent' Gift: Medical Objects as a Call to Action

Tinne Claes (Vesalius Museum, Leuven)

Asbestos:
From Industrial 'Miracle Mineral' to Hazardous Legacy in Medical Collections

Manuel Kaiser (Medical Collection, Bern)

The Dangerous Heritage Guide to the Collection:
Managing Toxic and Hazardous Medical Heritage

Peter Loockx (Centre for Technical, Scientific and Industrial Heritage, Gent)

11.00 – 11.30 **Coffee / tea**

11.30 – 13.00 **SESSION 5: CARE AND CONSENT**

Chair: Dawn Kemp (Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, London)

Beyond Bentham: Re-examining Ideas of Consent and Body Donation through Museum Collections in the UK and Ireland

Evi Numen (Old Anatomy Museum, Dublin)
Cat Irving (Surgeons' Hall Museums, Edinburgh)
Trish Biers (The Duckworth Laboratoy, Cambridge)

Living Donor Anatomical Collections:
A Catalyst for Research, Teaching, and Public Engagement

Anna Dhody (Dhody Research Institute, Flourtown, Pennsylvania, USA)
Marianne Hamel (Jersey Shore Forensics, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA)
Rachel Lance (Durham, USA)

A Matter of Care: Rethinking Human Remains as Objects of Ethical and Museological Responsibility

Alice Cusan (University of Aberdeen)
Giovanni Magno (Morgagni Museum of Anatomy, Padua)

13.00 – 14.00 **Lunch**

14.00 – 15.30 **SESSION 6: VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE**

Chair: Sarah Bond (Science Museum, London)

Collecting and Interpreting the Invisible and Undervalued: Nursing Heritage

Manon Parry (University of Amsterdam)

Opening the Conversation: Examining the Value and Challenges of Representing Pregnancy Loss within a National Museum Collection

Harriet Jackson (Science Museum, London)

Sensitive not Sensational. Displaying and Interpreting the Gravid Uterus Casts

Sophie Goggins (National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh)
Nicky Reeves (Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery, Glasgow)

15.30 – 16.15 **Coffee / tea & group photo**

16.15 – 17.45 **SESSION 7: MATERIAL MATTERS: WAX AND PLASTER**

Chair: Phil Loring (National Medical Museum, Oslo)

From Travelling Fairground Show to Museum Collection: What Wax Models Can Tell us about the Origin, History and Conservational Needs of an Anatomical Panopticon

Johanna Kreil (Technical University Munich)

Immunotherapy, Radiotherapy, Experimental Infections: Wax Moulages as Individual Patient Documents and Starting Point for Medical-historical Research

Michael Geiges (Museum of Wax Moulages, Zurich)

The Plaster Casts of Pierre, Emile, and Jean-Baptiste: Exploring the History of Grafted Soldiers in WWI from Below

Tiphaine Lours (Center for History, Sciences Po Paris)

SATURDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2025

LOCATION: **Volkshochschule Ingolstadt** | Hallstraße 5, Ingolstadt

9.00 – 11.00 **SESSION 8: SPECIMENS AND ENGAGEMENT**

Chair: Thomas Schnalke (Berliner Medizinhistorisches Museum der Charité)

Trauma-Informed Object-based Learning with Pathology Specimen Collections
Rebecca Lush (Integrated Pathology Learning Centre, Queensland, Australia)

Gall Skulls in Medical Museums and Anatomical Collections

Marion Hulverscheidt (University of Kassel)
Andreas Winkelmann (Medical School Brandenburg, Neuruppin)

Endangered Specimens, Unaccountable Objects. Medico-historical Collections and Human Biomaterial: Competing ethical claims, phenomenological effects, and the historical commons

Michael Sappol (University of Uppsala)

"Heart of the Matter. Medical Specimens in the Museum" First Results of the Online Visitor Survey

Sonja Marschall (University of Leipzig)
Marion Maria Ruisinger (Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum, Ingolstadt)

11.00 – 11.30 **Coffee / tea**

11.30 – 13.00 **SESSION 9: TRACING THE INDIVIDUAL IN HUMAN REMAINS**

Chair: Margaret Werry (University of Minnesota, USA)

Provenance Research on Human Fetuses: Single Objects or Ensemble?

Rainer Brömer (University of Marburg)

The Tales They Can Tell: Individual Stories and Social Histories in Surgeons' Hall Museum's Collection

Cat Irving (Surgeons' Hall Museums, Edinburgh)

Searching for the Individual by Accessing the Past

Sabina Carraro (Medical Collection, University of Zurich)
Johanna Stierlin (Medical Collection, University of Zurich)

13.00 – 13.30 **Closing remarks**

from 13.30 **Farewell Lunch**

18.00 – 24.00 **Night of the Museums**

Ask for free tickets at the conference desk
www.ndm.ingolstadt.de

With the kind support of

INGOLSTÄDTER AIRPORT EXPRESS

Sparkasse Ingolstadt Eichstätt

Ken Arnold

One Thing at a Time:
The power of individual objects in an era of overload

The power of unusual things held across time has been at the heart of museum thinking and practice at least since the Renaissance. Such objects have a special capacity to capture our attention, our imaginations. And in an era of overwhelming distraction from a surfeit of stimuli and stuff, their importance can only grow.

My talk will begin with a look at some notable museum projects that concentrate on individual exhibits – big and small: Stockholm's Vasa Museum (as an example of a gallery built around one ship); the Museum of One Painting named after G. V. Myasnikov in Penza, Russia; a set of single-artefact events called The Thing Is… produced by Wellcome Collection; and a collaborative initiative ('First Time Out') involving five London museums that each presented a never-before-displayed artefact.

Drawing inspiration from key scholars and thinkers – anthropologist Lévi-Strauss' notion of things being 'good to think with'; Russian/American literary scholar Mikhail Epshtein's ideas about a 'lyrical' approach to material culture; philosopher Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' and historian Carlo Ginzburg's 'science of singularities' – I will go on to explore the broader and deeper significance of our ability, within museums, to focus on specific things. Museums can, I argue, provide lessons in how to concentrate.

More pragmatically, my conclusion will suggest ways that museums can make more of this one-thing-at-a-time approach: describing their potential to exploit single-object displays and exhibitions, as well as opportunities to provide visitors with guided access to particular items, enabling thoroughly immersive experiences.

CONTACT

Ken Arnold
University of Copenhagen | Medical Museion, Copenhagen
e-mail: kra@sund.ku.dk

Karin Tybjerg
Eva Åhrén

The Cholera Bottle:
Connecting Past and Present Understandings of Disease Materialities

This paper takes its point of departure in a single object: a sealed glass flask, containing a sample of cholera excretions collected during the 1853 cholera epidemic in Denmark or Sweden. The bottle appears to be unique, and we do not know the motivation for crafting this object at the time – for microscopic study, as a pathological sample, or a diagnostic tool. The bottle is now held at the Medical Museion in Copenhagen and offers a case for investigating how a single object can connect diverse fields of inquiry in medical museums and medical history.

First: the bottle allows us to investigate a borderline case of human remains. It is at once a historical source, a pathological specimen, a biomedical sample of an old strain of cholera, and a wormhole into past experience of disease. Second: researching the bottle and its historical contexts provide us with a window into a period of transition in understanding disease – before bacteriology – when the understanding of disease was negotiated between pathology and laboratory investigations.

We will trace evidence of the materialities used to capture diseased matter, and the networks of doctors and scholars investigating cholera, thus connecting the flask to archival holdings in Stockholm, Copenhagen and beyond. In the paper we will thus combine a discussion of the status of the bottle today, with a historical investigation into what kind of object it might have been to investigators of disease in the mid-19th century.

CONTACT

Karin Tybjerg | Medical Museion, Copenhagen | e-mail: karin.tybjerg@sund.ku.dk
Eva Åhrén | Karolinska Institute, Stockholm | e-mail: eva.ahren@ki.se

Kjell Asplund

The Archive Chest. A Witness of 362 Years of Continuity of Sweden's Model of Central Government of Health Care

During my years as Director General of the National Board of Health and Welfare and Chief Medical Officer of Sweden, there was a large old chest outside my office. This was the year 1663 archive chest of the government authority (and its predecessors). In my presentation I will trace the archive chest through its odyssey during which it has been witnessing the ups and downs of central governance of Swedish healthcare.

Main sources have been written accounts on the history of the Board and ist predecessors published in the late 19th century and the mid 20th century, complemented by own archive studies, interview with an expert in furniture history and visits to previous locations of the authority.

In Sweden, government ministries are of relatively modest size. Instead, there is a long tradition of the central governance exerted by non-political government agencies. Collegium Medicorum (with many subsequent changes of names) was founded in 1663 by a royal resolution. One of its first actions was to acquire the baroque-style archive chest.

The chest and the agency have endured dependency of capricious autocratic kings, hardships during the many wars fought with Russia and Denmark, numerous moves within the capital (some of them dramatic) and a disastrous fire. During some years of destitution, the precious chest was pledged for unpaid rents. Today, it may be regarded as a very concrete "generator of enquiry" when the 362 years of continuity of Sweden's model of central government of health care is explored.

CONTACT

Kjell Asplund
Umeå University
e-mail: kjellasplund1@gmail.com

Lisa Woop

Materiality and Teaching: Transformation of Anatomical Eye Models from the 17th to the 20th Century

This presentation examines the diverse materiality of anatomical eye models and their impact on medical education throughout history. The research centers on four distinctive historical models from the collection of Deutsches Optisches Museum, which will be featured in the permanent exhibition's introductory space on level "Meso" (working title), dedicated to the topics eye and camera.

Specimens represent different periods as well as manufacturing approaches: In chronological order there is first an exceptional silver model circa 1700; then an intricately crafted ivory piece by Heinrich Muth from the early 18th century; third a more accessible papier-mâché model from Dr. Louis Thomas Jerome Auzoux's workshop from the middle of the 19th century and lastly a contemporary Somso plastic model from the 1960s, which is produced in a similar fashion to this day.

The analysis explores the interplay between materials and pedagogical methods. The talk will present to which degree the specific selection of materials shaped and influenced various teaching methodologies and instructional approaches. In addition, it will explore how the changing demands and requirements of medical education over time directly informed and guided both the careful selection of materials and the development of manufacturing processes and techniques. This dynamic relationship has been instrumental in shaping anatomical teaching tools across centuries, as demonstrated through our selected examples.

CONTACT

Lisa Woop
Deutsches Optisches Museum, Jena
e-mail: lisa.woop@deutsches-optisches-museum.de

Maria Carla Garbarino
Paolo Mazzarello
Fabio Pagella
Alessandro Porro

The “Laryngo-Fantome” of Carlo Labus. A Precious Teaching Tool with Great Evocative Power

The Camillo Golgi Museum is a small museum of the Pavia University, born in the premises that housed the General Pathology laboratory, directed between the end of the nineteenth century and the first twenty years of the twentieth century by Camillo Golgi (1843-1926), winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1906 for his contribution to neuroanatomy.

The Museum preserves a particular object, the “Laryngo-Fantome” of Carlo Labus (1844-1909) for laryngoscopic operations, marketed by Ferdinando Baldinelli (1835-1906) and purchased by Golgi in 1883. The instrument was used to train students in laryngoscopy surgery operations. It is a metal model that represents the front half of the head with the mouth, pharynx and larynx, modelled according to the natural conformation. On the back of the head there was a small drawer in which a piece of paper was placed (to simulate a foreign body to be removed). The extraction took place with the support of a laryngoscopic mirror. The model was inserted into an electrical circuit together with the pliers that the operator had to use for extraction. If during the operation he had touched any point on the walls of the throat, the electrical circuit would have closed, preventing the view of the operating field.

This is one of the first examples of automation programmed to self-correct thanks to a pioneering use of electricity. The tool is significant for its educational usefulness, testified by its presence in the fundamental work of Luigi Vittorio Nicolai (1853-1922), especially if it is ideally inserted (and presented to the public) in the evolution of educational aids used in the medical field (drawings and engravings, anatomical preparations, wax models) which show the search for an increasingly effective representation of the human body and greater interactivity.

CONTACT

Maria Carla Garbarino | ‘Camillo Golgi’ Museum, Pavia | e-mail: mariacarla.garbarino@unipv.it
Paolo Mazzarello | Kosmos Museum of Natural History, Pavia | e-mail: paolo.mazzarello@unipv.it
Fabio Pagella | University of Pavia | e-mail: fabio.pagella@unipv.it
Alessandro Porro | University of Milan | e-mail: alessandro.porro1@unimi.it

Katarzyna Jarosz

The Glass Man in Tashkent: A Revolutionary Model of Medical Education in the USSR

Over the course of the twentieth century, very modern museums of medicine began to proliferate across the Soviet Union. With their exhibitions of educational charts, wax models of human bodies or pictures presenting venereal diseases, they served to promote and educate on matters of health and hygiene.

My goal is to explore the role of Soviet museums of health and medicine through the lens of a particular exhibit: the “Glass Man” from the Museum of Healthcare in Tashkent.
The “Glass Man” is a life-size anatomical replica based on the famous “Glass Man” created in Dresden in 1930, still on display at the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. such replicas were produced in a specialized factory in the German Democratic Republic for educational and diplomatic purposes, and in 1973, the Tashkent exhibit, gifted to Uzbekistan by the Dresden Museum of Hygiene. It the only surviving example, as the others have been lost. Made of transparent plastic, it revealed a realistically rendered skeleton, internal organs, and blood vessels, serving as both an educational and propagandistic tool.

In addition to the “Glass Man”, there was also a “Glass Woman”, and together they toured the Soviet Union as part of mobile educational exhibitions. These traveling shows aimed to popularize knowledge about anatomy and hygiene, reaching even the most remote regions of the USSR. The history of the Glass Man highlights the integration of scientific innovation and state-driven narratives in Soviet public health education.

CONTACT

Katarzyna Jarosz
Wrocław University
e-mail: katarzynojarosz@gmail.com

Tricia Close-Koenig

Anatomy and Pathological Anatomy Heritage Collections

The Université de Strasbourg has an anatomy and pathological anatomy collection that is rich in historicity, dating to 1670. It was part of an Anatomy Museum of renown in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and attracted medical doctors, anatomists and the general public from all over the world. Much of this collection has been neglected and/or is stored away. I will present the history and current state of the collection. I will also probe the question of what is considered part and parcel of a heritage collection. I will argue that materials that were not included in the museum catalogues, such as human biological archives from a diagnosis laboratory in the same building, pedagogical and diagnosis iconography and accompanying documentation should also be considered part of the collection.

CONTACT

Tricia Close-Koenig
University of Strasbourg
e-mail: tkoenig@unistra.fr

Guenevere Souffreau

Musea Brugge

Musea Brugge is the municipal museum of Bruges and holds thirteen museum locations and more than 90.000 collection objects with a splendid diversity. The museum location Saint John's Hospital is one of Europe's oldest preserved hospital buildings. It houses seven paintings by the fifteenth century artist Hans Memling, and an authentic seventeenth century pharmacy, among other things. The hospital was founded in the twelfth century and welcomed anyone who needed care. Today, the city's health care facility is situated on the edge of town, but its name 'Saint John' still refers to the historical hospital location.

Recently Musea Brugge took the responsibility for taking care of a major part of the historical hospital collection that was in storage in a building that will be repurposed. In 2024 more than 20.000 objects were registered and moved to our museum storages. The objects date from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Monastic and personal items of the hospital sisters (paintings, furniture, personalised cutlery, etc.), liturgical objects (silverware, textiles, etc.), and c. 6.000 medical objects were discovered. A significant part of the medical collection can be situated in the twentieth century. They comprise many surgical and optical instruments, a dentist's cabinet, several ophthalmological apparatuses and various instruments for electrical and heat treatment procedures. One of the most striking objects is an iron lung for infants. In the forthcoming years we plan to do more research on these objects, so we want to reach out to international institutions with whom we could exchange expertise.

CONTACT

Guenevere Souffreau
Musea Brugge
e-mail: Guenevere.Souffreau@brugge.be

Zoë-Joy Vangansewinkel
Saskia Van de Voorde

The War Heritage Institute

The War Heritage Institute keeps a vast collection of medical objects, ranging from the small to the large such as thermometers and bandages to uniforms for medical staff and ambulances, and even specimens in alcohol. This paper allows us to shed light on a underrated part of our collection which is intrinsically linked to the history of the military in Belgium as well as other countries. In this presentation we will discuss the quantity and types of medical objects in the War Heritage Institute and how they entered the collection. Our medical collection gives an overview of medical equipment used between the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

We will furthermore explain how these objects are stored in our depots and the potential hazardous materials they can contain. This will lead us into elaborating more on our research into dangerous heritage in our museum.

CONTACT

Zoë-Joy Vangansewinkel | Brussels | e-mail: zoe-joy.vangansewinkel@warheritage.be
Saskia Van de Voorde | Brussels | e-mail: saskia.vandevoorde@warheritage.be

Luisa Rittershaus

Graphical Arts Collection “Humanity and Death”

Since 2019, we have been using an innovative teaching format in medical terminology at our institute, the Gallery Walk, which transforms a classic large-scale event into an individual and activating form of teaching and learning. This format is based on the visualization (images) and sensualization (objects) of teaching content, which is conveyed through an interactive and object-oriented approach. In small groups, students passing eight thematic tables covering different topics of medical terminology. This interactive method encourages active student participation and strengthens cognitive and social skills. My part introduces the so called Fabrica by Andreas Vesalius to the students, showing prints by the artist Josef Ferdinand Seitz from our Graphical Arts Collection Humanity and Death. Seitz has painted over the well-known muscle men in order to counter a scientific, rational concept of death with an emotional component. The Gallery Walk in general, and my part here in particular, is an example of the opportunities – in the sense of the Medical Humanities – offered by medical teaching on objects or with visual art.

The graphics collection was founded in 1976 and focuses on depictions of vanitas, in particular dances of death from the 16th to 20th centuries. It comprises around 6000 works on the subject of dying and death – including almost all the important dances of death from German-speaking countries as well as many works by prominent artists such as Kollwitz, Munch and Dalí.

CONTACT

Luisa Rittershaus
University of Düsseldorf
e-mail: anna-luisa.rittershaus@hhu.de

Veronica Dominiak

Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History

This presentation will provide an opportunity for the conference attendees to gain insight into the history, workings and future aspirations of The Geoffrey Kaye Museum of Anaesthetic History, part of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

The Museum, housed in a heritage listed building called Ulimaroa, is the largest collection worldwide with a focus on anaesthesia and related fields of pain medicine, intensive care and resuscitation. It is also one of the most comprehensive with an international scope as well as a strong focus on the specialties' history in Australasia. Through an external review and report, the collection has been recognised as extremely significant as a whole, items of national and international significance.

The Museum began as the personal collection of Geoffrey Alfred Kaye (1903-1986). Kaye became a key figure in Australian anaesthesia and is internationally regarded as a pioneer in the fields of anaesthetics and anaesthetic apparatus design.

Today, the collection is comprised of around 6,500 registered (accessioned and catalogued) items and another 3,000 items which either need to be formally accessioned or need to be catalogued. A small percentage (2%) of the collection is on display in Ulimaroa and the remainder is housed across a storeroom and a workroom.

The paper will showcase how the focus of the collection has changed over time. It was originally very centred on equipment and medical innovation. While that is still an important area, the Museum is now highlighting the people and stories behind the objects, as well as the objects themselves, through various media and engagement platforms such as online exhibitions and oral histories.

CONTACT

Veronica Dominiak
Melbourne, Australia
e-mail: vdominiak@anzca.edu.au

Henrik Eßler

The Hamburg Medical History Museum

The Hamburg Museum of Medical History was only founded in 2008 on the basis of the collections of the Department for the History and Ethics of Medicine. When the University clinics were rebuilt, the historical collection grew rapidly and was expanded in particular by teaching and research collections. Since 2013, the museum's permanent exhibition in the restored building of the former pathology department has been open to the public. As a university institution, the museum combines its teaching and research activities with public education programmes for school classes and other visitor groups. In its special exhibitions, the museum also addresses current ethical or social issues and combines artistic aspects with medicine. At the same time, the museum is dedicated to deal with the problematic and sensitive parts of the collection, such as holdings from colonial or coercive contexts (e.g. psychiatry).

CONTACT

Henrik Eßler
Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf
e-mail: h.essler@uke.de

Leo Weiß

Medical History Collection

A common disadvantage of classical permanent exhibitions is their rigidity; once established, they often age and lose relevance, with limited options for modification. Attempting to update parts of the exhibition can leave noticeable gaps due to the overarching theme and underlying logic.

To address these issues, our current concept of a "permanent pop-up exhibition" instead relies on several smaller, independent thematic sections. Each section utilizes the collection's stock of approximately 10,000 objects to highlight specific facets of medical history in object-centered presentations. This approach affords a high degree of interdisciplinary and student collaboration in the creation of individual sections, further enriching the breadth of perspectives.

The presentation shares our experiences with the concept and highlights various advantages in respect to flexibility, teaching and customization of visitor experiences.

CONTACT

Leo Weiß
Ruhr-University Bochum
e-mail: leo.weiss@ruhr-uni-bochum.de

Eloïse Quétel

The Medical and Pathological Dupuytren collections

Our presentation will aim to make you discover the medical and pathological Dupuytren collections of Sorbonne Université, which are mainly composed with the former Musée Dupuytren's collections. For more than seven years now, those collections have been completely reorganised and reconsidered. From 6.000 specimens when the museum closed, those collections bring together now more than 30.000 specimens and objects, comprising a wide variety of types, such as anatomical preparations (wet or dry), instruments, histological slides, photographic plates, anatomical wax models, works of art (graphic or sculpted), as well as documentary, educational, and photographic archives.

The collections are now housed in storage rooms at the Pierre and Marie Curie University, and a lot of projects are underway, such as inventory, research (history of the collections, history of science, samplings...), conservation, restoration, enhancement (visits, exhibitions, videos etc.) and so on.

One of our main goal, is to de-anonymize patients in order to provide full information concerning our collections, obviously while following the laws regarding personal and medical data.

Thus, our presentation will focus on one of our projects which is to trace the individuals within the medical collections by taking as an example one of our first major surveys, which allowed us to build bridges between the disciplines and push the discoveries and the field of possibilities further.

CONTACT

Eloïse Quétel
Sorbonne University, Paris
e-mail: eloise.quetel@sorbonne-universite.fr

Neave Anne Geoghegan

Human Remains Archives

This research examines how foetal and infant and juvenile remains within medical and health science education spaces have transitioned from being "specimens" to be studied to human subjects, by using the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa's human remain archives. This thesis investigates the sourcing, use of, and attitudes toward these sensitive materials in medical education throughout South Africa's complex socio-political history into the contemporary era. The study employs feminist theoretical framework as well as Foucault's archaeology of thought to understand how these remains functioned as „objects" of medical knowledge while being inherently connected to women's bodies and experiences.

By examining the human remain archives and their associated documentation and conducting interviews with current academic staff and focus groups with students, this research traces how changing ethical paradigms and teaching practices have transformed the status of these materials from pedagogical tools to complex bearers of historical, social, and medical significance. This work speaks directly to contemporary challenges of medical museum spaces regarding the display and use of human remains, particularly in educational contexts. It provides insights into how institutions can balance the pedagogical value of these materials with ethical considerations and changing societal attitudes. The findings contribute to broader discussions about the power of single 'objects' in medical collections; their role in knowledge production; and the "care work" required in managing sensitive materials. This research aims to demonstrate how careful historical analysis can inform current and future museum practices and ethical guidelines for handling human remains in educational settings.

CONTACT

Neave Anne Geoghegan
University of Witwatersrand, South Africa
e-mail: 1373127@students.wits.ac.za

Sandra Bahr Ulloa

Museum of Human Anatomy and Physical Anthropology

At the University of Medical Sciences of Matanzas, in Cuba, in 2021 a Museum of Human Anatomy and Physical Anthropology was founded, associated with Anatomy department. It arose from a small university collection of pieces of historical, cultural, multidisciplinary and teaching value, as well as the need to create a common space for the different medical specialties, in order to disseminate the advances in basic sciences applied to health.

The sums of this presentation is to describe the museographic design proposal of the museum's university collection, as well as its contributions to the training of professionals from other areas of knowledge. It exhibits real anatomical pieces, normals and pathological, which brings a new dimension to contemporary medical teaching. The pieces was obtained from inter-institutional and interdisciplinary collaboration of medical institutions. The design took into account the structures to be exhibited and their teaching, medical and extension involvement. It includes exhibition shelves with colors reminiscent of biology and a museographic script that covers comparative anatomy, the origin of man, the development of human anatomy and its application in physical, forensic, cultural anthropology and in health development.

This museum has allowed the associated creation of a multidisciplinary Physical Anthropology associations, student and professional scientific work groups, professors and children from primary and secondary schools associated with professional interests in the health sciences, as well as events and workshops convened by the museum that demonstrate the contribution to the culture of society from our profile.

CONTACT

Sandra Bahr Ulloa
Matanzas, Cuba
e-mail: sandrab.mtz.cu@gmail.com

İrem Alpay

Gülhane Medical History Museum

This paper examines the pathological specimen collection at the Gülhane Medical History Museum, affiliated with the University of Health Sciences and located within the Gülhane Research and Training Hospital in Ankara, Türkiye. Comprising thirty-five specimens, the collection was transferred in the 2000s from Numune Hospital, Ankara's oldest medical institution. While these specimens are attributed to Hamdi Suat Aknar, the founder of pathology in the Ottoman Empire, the dating of some specimens raises questions, as markings suggest pathological preparations continued into the 1960s. Many specimens suffer from significant conservation issues, including deterioration, with notable examples such as an infant's head and a bisected adult face, which evoke strong emotional responses; however, their origins and creators remain unknown.

Since its establishment in 1988, the museum has relied on the fixed asset records system, resulting in a lack of formal documentation and provenance research, raising ethical concerns regarding the specimens' handling and display. Türkiye lacks regulations governing the ethical treatment of human remains in museum collections. As such, there is a critical need to reassess the collection in accordance with international best practices and ethical guidelines. The findings of this study could inform policy development for other Turkish medical museums, encouraging broader institutional changes in the ethical stewardship of human remains. Through engagement with stakeholders and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, the Gülhane Medical History Museum has the potential to lead the creation of an ethical framework for the conservation and display of pathological specimens, setting a pioneering precedent for ethical practices in Turkish medical museums.

CONTACT

İrem Alpay
Koç University Vehbi Koç Ankara Studies Research Center (VEKAM), Ankara
e-mail: ialpay21@ku.edu.tr

Kerstin Hulter Åsberg

René Laënnec's Stethoscope

One of the highlights in Uppsala Medical History Museum, Sweden, is René Laënnec´s (1781-1826) own stethoscope, which he personally gave as a gift to Magnus Retzius (1795-1871), a Swedish doctor and professor in obstetrics, in Paris in 1822. Later on, the stethoscope was to evolve into the foremost symbol of scientific medicine and healthcare.

As a medical scientist, Laënnec developed the method of auscultation, i.e. of listening to the sounds of the chest, the heart and the lungs, among patients with tuberculosis. In the beginning of the 19th century, this disease was increasing rapidly in the society, and Laënnec himself died from tuberculosis at the age of 45 years.

At the museum, Laënnecs stethoscope is a strong generator of enquiry, since it will initiate the narrative about the important physical examination, which was and still is fundamental to medical diagnosis. Also, it is an evocative medical object in teaching about how to differ between healthy sounds and sick sounds of the chest, as well as the importance of listening to the patient´s own narrative about his actual symptoms of illness.

This single medical historical object will tell the visitors more than hundreds of modern stethoscopes!

CONTACT

Kerstin Hulter Åsberg
Medical History Museum, Uppsala
e-mail: kerstin.hulter.asberg@uu.se

Shelley McKellar

Physick's Tonsil Guillotine

In 1828, the influential American physician and surgeon Philip Syng Physick (1768-1837) introduced his tonsil guillotine as an improved method to remove inflamed tonsils. The simple instrument consisted of a sharp, sliding blade that passed through a metal frame to excise the tonsil in one swift motion. Intended to offer surgeons a more precise and less painful removal of tonsils, this instrument (and its guillotine moniker) is problematic for what it promised to achieve, its connection to decapitation, and its triggering of a broader visceral response when 'cutting' into the living body. It evokes debate regarding when and how to intervene surgically, and who decides.

This presentation focuses on Physick's tonsil guillotine to examine the role played by the materialities (or physical 'things') of surgery – specifically, the surgical blade (instrumentation) and the 'cut' ('doing') – in surgical decision-making in the 19th century. The research draws from contemporary instrument catalogues, medical publications, personal papers, and medical artifact collections to explore tacit knowledge and decision-making in the history of surgery. My work takes an object-centred approach, with its focus on the use-context and use-value of surgical instruments within broader theories of materiality and meaning, highlighting their intrinsic properties and thus power as objects.

CONTACT

Shelley McKellar
Western University, London, Canada
e-mail: smckell@uwo.ca

Lucie Biehler-Gomez
Bruno Falconi
Paolo Maria Galimberti
Alessandro Porro

Instruments for Ovaroclasia (1888)

On August 16, 1887, a private surgical procedure was performed in Lugano, Switzerland, involving the crushing of the ovary while leaving it in situ as a treatment for a psychiatric disorder. Edoardo Porro (1846-1902), director of the Royal School of Obstetrics in Milan, carried out the procedure using a Klemmer forceps. Though technically successful, it did not resolve the condition, leading to a subsequent intervention by Robert Lawson Tait (1845-1899), who removed the ovary. The negative outcome fueled a heated controversy between the two surgeons.

On November 26, 1888, Pier Matteo Fontana (1851-1902) manually performed a similar procedure in Brescia, resulting in partial symptomatic improvement. That same year, Porro published a monograph defending his method, introducing two instruments for ovaroclasia, manufactured in Milan by Baldinelli and Gennari.

The procedure never gained widespread acceptance and was not cited in contemporary gynecological literature. The two instruments are now preserved in the museum collections of the Fondazione IRCCS Ca' Granda Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico in Milan. They do not appear in manufacturer catalogs, suggesting they were never commercially distributed. A third, undocumented instrument is also part of the collection.

These surgical tools serve as historical artifacts, reflecting a now-obsolete intervention. They also highlight the medical attitudes and gendered biases that shaped women's healthcare in the late 19th century.

CONTACT

Lucie Biehler-Gomez | University of Milan | e-mail: lucie.biehler@unimi.it
Bruno Falconi | University of Brescia | e-mail: bruno.falconi@unibs.it
Paolo Maria Galimberti | Milano | e-mail: paolo.galimberti@policlinico.mi.it (??)
Alessandro Porro | University of Milan | e-mail: alessandro.porro1@unimi.it

Magdalena Czartoryjska Meier

Hat of a Renowned Surgeon

The affective turn occurring in museums since the 2010s has reshaped curatorial practices and, by extension, exhibitions. It has set a trend of abandoning the creation of purely contemplative and informative spaces in favour of promoting experiences. Emotions have been made the subject of exhibitions, their importance in the process of acquiring knowledge and in museum-going acknowledged. However, they also intervene behind the scenes and play an important role in the formation of collections.

Medical collections are designed to bear witness to the development and evolution of science and therapeutic practice. When presented to the public, these instruments, devices, and preparations can easily arouse emotions: fascination and awe, but also revulsion, disgust, or fear. Yet the very gesture of collecting contains an element of emotion. And it is precisely emotion that motivates the inclusion of objects not directly related to medicine in historical medical collections. Perceived there, they make us wonder and provoke further investigation. They are objects of attachment that provide insights into the mechanisms of collecting, create a special bond with those to whom they once belonged, and may even allow us to trace back to the passion that drove their work.

CONTACT

Magdalena Czartoryjska Meier
Lausanne University Hospital
e-mail: magdalena.czartoryjska-meier@chuv.ch

Malthe Kouassi Bjerregaard

A Block of Margarine

Medical museums often grapple with how to exhibit the complex entanglements of food, nutrition and health. The objects of nutritional science are typical immaterial data or abstruse laboratory equipment. Meanwhile, food products are represented through reproductions or entirely excluded from museum collections due to conservation concerns.

At Medical Museion in Copenhagen, these challenges were embraced when the exhibition Margarine opened in March 2024 – an exhibition for which I was the lead curator. Margarine is rarely talked about today, but it used to be everywhere: In advertisements, in the kitchen, and in our bloodstreams. The exhibition sought to bridge the gap between everyday life and medical research, exploring margarine's role in shaping Danish culture, industry, and public health.
Upon entering the exhibition, visitors were met with 44 blocks of real, pale-yellow margarine presented under glass on a tall, beautiful display case. By displaying actual blocks of margarine, the exhibition played with the absurdity of elevating a mundane, mass-produced food item to the status of a museum artefact.

In my paper, I will examine the challenges and opportunities of displaying a non-museum object like margarine in a medical museum. And what does it mean to display a perishable non-museum object that is absent from the collections but ever-present in cultural memory? How can an everyday object like a margarine block help audiences connect with larger health debates?

CONTACT

Malthe Kouassi Bjerregaard
Medical Museion, Copenhagen
e-mail: malthebj@sund.ku.dk

Harriet Palfreyman
Stephanie Seville

"Some photos to remind you of the growth of your baby": Catherine Chisholm's Photograph Album and the Ethics of Photographic Display

Dr Catherine Chisholm (1879-1952) was the first woman to qualify in medicine from Manchester University. She went on to found the Manchester Babies Hospital, as well as work as a campaigner in feminist and medical groups throughout her career. Upon her retirement, the Medical Committee of the Babies Hospital presented her with a photograph album which they inscribed with the words 'Some photos to remind you of the growth of your baby'. The album contains photographs of staff, the grounds and wards, and many young patients who resided there. The album is now a part of the Museum of Medicine and Health held at the University of Manchester.

The album brims with potential for both teaching and public engagement. It generates enquiry into the life of a pioneering physician, as well as the wider world of women's medical work in the early twentieth century. Yet it also insists we engage with issues of care; how do we care for the object, but also the many subjects of the photographs within? Several of the photographs show children undergoing medical procedures, sleeping in hospital beds, or in states of undress that are troubling to display. Building on recent work into the ethics of displaying historical clinical photographs in museums or outreach settings, this paper then grapples with the complexity of the album as a powerfully evocative object. As custodians of the album, we must ask ourselves can we use it in display, in teaching, or in public settings at all?

CONTACT

Harriet Palfreyman | Museum of Medicine and Health, University of Manchester
e-mail: harriet.palfreyman@manchester.ac.uk

Stephanie Seville | Museum of Medicine and Health, University of Manchester
e-mail: stephanie.seville@manchester.ac.u

Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz

The Guest Book. A Key Object Bearing Evidence of Transnational Knowledge Exchange

This presentation is about a relatively newly arrived object at the Medical History Museum of Gothenburg. A guest book used at the surgical department of the Sahlgrenska hospital. The guest book which became a part of the museum's collection in 2016 has its first signature made by queen Victoria in 1918 and was used until 1994.

Within the framework of a master's thesis in History of Ideas and Science at University of Gothenburg I am investigating how the guest book plays a role both in reconnecting objects in the collections and re-building their context as well as how the content in the guest book acts as a source for deepened knowledge of national and international knowledge exchange.

In the study focus is on the years around the orthopaedic surgeon Sven Johansson's (1880-1959) introduction of the new technique for treating fractures of the neck of the femur in 1932. During these years several international colleagues came to the surgical department and the signatures in the guest book give an insight into how the knowledge of new techniques were shared and spread. Within museum's collections there are objects, letters, photos, film etc that further confirms the knowledge exchange between colleagues. The aim is to investigate how objects in a museum collection and the relation between them can be used as historical source material and to show how a local medical historical collection holds traces of national as well as international contacts which hopefully now can be reconnected.

CONTACT

Lisa Sputnes Mouwitz
Medical History Museum, Gothenburg
e-mail: lisa.mouwitz@vgregion.se

Patti Gaal-Holmes

Rudolf Schmitt and the 'lost' *Museum des Kindes* (ca. 1932)

This paper focuses on the 'lost' *Museum des Kindes* (MdK), an educational museum focusing on foetal development and newborn care established by German conservator/director Rudolf Schmitt (1878-1934). Initial enquiries were prompted by a 1931 photograph of Schmitt holding a mummified infant, surrounded by other specimens including a foetus and adult hand in alcohol, and a prepared bear claw and fish tablet. The mummified infant particularly provokes further enquiry, e.g. on provenance, permissions, and how this object relates to Schmitt's work as a conservator and to the broader MdK collection, which Schmitt considered 'his life's work'.

Schmitt was a student of the Leipzig anatomist Werner Spalteholz and notably participated in the 1898-1899 Valdivia expedition prior to his 30-year tenure as conservator/curator at the Altona Museum (Hamburg). The MdK was officially opened in June 1932 but had various earlier smaller iterations as Schmitt sought to fully establish it. Records suggest that Schmitt was inspired by visiting the 1911 International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden.

The MdK's 'lost' history is likely due to Schmitt's untimely 1934 death combined with the destruction of museum records during WW2 fire-bombing raids. Aside from brief mentions by historians, e.g. in Susan Köstering's survey of Hamburg's Natural History museums, the MdK and Schmitt's work are both otherwise forgotten. This paper draws on archival sources to provide extensive details about the MdK, whilst raising pertinent questions on the provenance and acquisition of its human specimens and ethics of exhibiting human remains, whilst also considering broader socio-political and historical contexts.

CONTACT

Patti Gaal-Holmes
Arts University Bournemouth
e-mail: pgaalholmes@aub.ac.uk

Tinne Claes

From 'Terrible' to 'Magnificent' Gift: Medical Objects as a Call to Action

In his much-cited work on artifacts and documentation related to state-sponsored violence, Roger Simon introduced the concept of the "terrible gift" to describe the ethical responsibility museums bear when presenting difficult histories (Simon 2006). Simon argued that artifacts and testimonies, particularly those tied to trauma, impose a moral burden on audiences, compelling them to do more than simply remember. He described these objects as „terrible gifts" that place demanding responsibilities on those who receive them.

This presentation seeks to reframe Simon's notion of the "terrible gift" in the context of the contemporary shift toward socially engaged museum practices, including in medical museums (e.g. Janes and Sandell 2019; Chynoweth et al. 2021). Today, museums are increasingly expected to contribute to positive social change by motivating visitors to take both personal and societal action. I therefore propose transforming the "terrible gift" into a "magnificent gift" – not a burden but an opportunity for museums to foster active engagement and social change. These objects should perhaps not even be viewed as "gifts", but as actively sought acquisitions – corrections that enable us to confront and acknowledge the difficult histories of the institutions that house our collections and museums, such as universities and hospitals.

Using the example of the future Vesalius Museum, a new university museum focused on science and care, set to open in Leuven, Belgium at the end of 2026, this talk will explore how medical objects – linked to historical suffering and discrimination – can be powerful tools for raising awareness and prompting action in the present-day. Drawing on concrete examples from our planned permanent exhibition, as well as displays from other medical museums, I will demonstrate how these objects can be transformed into a call for action on pressing matters such as health inequalities.

CONTACT

Tinne Claes
Vesalius Museum, Leuven
e-mail: tinne.claes@kuleuven.be

Manuel Kaiser

Asbestos: From Industrial ‘Miracle Mineral’ to Hazardous Legacy in Medical Collections

Asbestos is an intriguing yet challenging material – especially in the context of medical-history collections and museums. It has been used as an industrial material in a wide range of products since the 19th century. In the 20th century, it became the subject of medical research and was increasingly recognized as a health hazard. As a common component of technical objects, it can be found in many medical collections today, posing a significant challenge to the preservation of these objects.

The Medical Collection Bern uses its own asbestos-containing objects as a starting point for a deeper exploration of the material’s history. This paper traces the trajectory of asbestos, from its rise as a widely celebrated industrial material to its growing recognition as a health hazard and its current status as a hazardous material in museum collections.

The analysis will focus on selected objects from the Medical Collection Bern. By applying an object-biography approach, the paper will follow the manufacture and use of these objects, highlighting the historical, industrial, and cultural significance of asbestos in the medical context. Following this trajectory, the paper will also examine the management of asbestos-containing objects within the Medical Collection Bern today, focusing on strategies for the identification, isolation, and removal of this mineral. Additionally, it will address the practical and ethical challenges of managing asbestos, particularly in light of budgetary constraints in smaller institutions.

CONTACT

Manuel Kaiser
Medical Collection, Bern
e-mail: manuel.kaiser@unibe.ch

Peter Loockx

The Dangerous Heritage Guide to the Collection: Managing Toxic and Hazardous Medical Heritage

Rule One: Don’t Panic.

The discovery of toxic or hazardous substances in medical collections often triggers strong reactions – either the will to preserve everything unconditionally or eliminating all perceived dangers. However, medical heritage frequently includes pharmaceuticals, arsenic-based medicines, mercury compounds, volatile chemicals, and narcotics that require careful handling.

Rather than reacting in absolutes, this paper presents a structured approach to managing toxic medical heritage. Using a “museum balance scale” methodology, it evaluates the historical, scientific, and ethical significance of such materials while addressing safety regulations, conservation challenges, and legal restrictions. Best practices for risk assessment, ethical display, storage, and responsible disposal will be discussed through case studies from medical collections, including those of the Heritage House - Sisters of Mercy and Sint-Jan Hospital Brugge.

By carefully weighing risks and values, institutions can make informed decisions, ensuring that these powerful yet complex objects remain accessible for research and education without compromising safety or ethical responsibilities. The key is not to panic – but to handle with knowledge, care, and critical evaluation.

CONTACT

Peter Loockx
Centre for Technical, Scientific and Industrial Heritage, Gent
e-mail: Peter.Loockx@stad.gent

Evi Numen
Cat Irving
Trish Biers

Beyond Bentham: Re-examining Ideas of Consent and Body Donation through Museum Collections in the UK and Ireland

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it is usually presumed that anti-dissection sentiment led to a fear of grave robbing in the Britain and Ireland. Indeed, the fear of dissection was codified into law and amplified by the 1752 'Murder Act', which made dissection a further punishment for the crime of murder. Contemporary sensationalist press articles expressing outrage or ridicule towards dissection further colour our current impressions of the societal consensus.

This paper will challenge accepted narratives of post-mortem consent using records of medical body donation as early as the eighteenth century. Archival documents and medical human remains collections dating to the following century furnish more evidence of rising support of body donation by both anatomists and members of the public in the face of folk prejudice and stigma. These significant examples found in the collections of University College London, University of Cambridge, and Trinity College Dublin, amongst others, show that popular views on body donation were far from universal. However, body donation was neither encouraged nor supported through legislation, a flaw that the 1832 Anatomy Act failed to remedy by omission.

Ideas about historical consent still inform modern museological ideas about display and retention of nineteenth century medical collections, highlighting the importance of a reassessment of this history. The authors hope that this paper will inspire contributions of further examples of early body donation, found in collections beyond the scope of this paper.

CONTACT

Evi Numen | Old Anatomy Museum, Dublin | e-mail: evi.numen@tcd.ie
Cat Irving | Surgeons' Hall Museums, Edinburgh | e-mail: C.Irving@rcsed.ac.uk
Trish Biers | The Duckworth Laboratory, Cambridge | e-mail: tmb40@cam.ac.uk

Anna Dhody
Marianne Hamel
Rachel Lance

Living Donor Anatomical Collections: A Catalyst for Research, Teaching, and Public Engagement

Two years ago, I consented to donating of a piece of my body to a medical museum. However, because of the lack of guidelines for such a donation, my tissue is being used in ways against my consent.

Professionally, I am a biomedical engineer who directs human subject research, and I must follow international laws regarding consent for my work to be considered ethical. I was therefore stunned to learn through my donation process that in many countries, including my own, as in the time of Henrietta Lacks patients still have no rights once tissue leaves their bodies. One physician confirmed to me in writing that he keeps body parts for Duke University's private collection without patient knowledge or consent; this act is legal. Therefore, more problematic medical collections are being collected today, with the same paucity of consent and provenance.

Without clearer international policies for museum displays and research done with medical objects that get collected moving forward, the professionals of tomorrow will face our same problems. I propose presenting a suggested rubric of tenets taken from the modern laws for human subject research, filtered through the lens of my own disastrous donation, which can be used to build guidelines for future samples.

For example, donors should be asked if their tissues may be used in profit-generating research. Museums should provide donors with information about how to withdraw consent. Donors, who like me are often disabled people, should be able to make reasonable requests regarding contextualization of their tissues.

CONTACT

Anna Dhody | Dhody Research Institute, Flourtown, Pennsylvania, USA
e-mail: anna@dhodyresearchinstitute.org
Marianne Hamel | Jersey Shore Forensics, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA | e-mail: marianne.hamel@gmail.com
Rachel Lance | Durham, USA | e-mail: aquaticrachel@gmail.com

Alice Cusan
Giovanni Magno

A Matter of Care: Rethinking Human Remains as Objects of Ethical and Museological Responsibility

Medical museums are increasingly confronted with the ethical complexities of displaying and caring for human remains as singular objects. Beyond their materiality, these remains embody histories of scientific practice, cultural significance, and ethical dilemmas. This paper explores how care – both as a curatorial principle and a relational practice – shapes the treatment, display, and interpretation of human remains in medical collections.

This study examines how museum professionals conceptualise care beyond conservation by drawing on ethnographic research at the Museo Morgagni of Human Anatomy (Padua, Italy). By applying Joan Tronto's "caring democracy" and Annemarie Mol's "logic of care", I argue that care is not a static practice but an ongoing negotiation between institutional priorities, ethical responsibilities, and visitor perceptions. How do museums balance scientific detachment with ethical sensitivity? What strategies – such as photography bans, contextualised narratives, and visitor engagement – foster a more empathetic relationship between the living and the dead?

This paper contributes to discussions on the materiality of human remains, the evolving ethics of display, and the responsibilities of medical museums as spaces of care. By reframing human remains as subjects of care rather than mere objects of study, this research highlights how museums can foster a more inclusive, ethical, and emotionally aware engagement with these sensitive specimens.

CONTACT

Alice Cusan | University of Aberdeen | e-mail: a.cusan.21@abdn.ac.uk
Giovanni Magno | Morgagni Museum of Anatomy, Padua | e-mail: giovanni.magno@unipd.it

Manon Parry

Collecting and Interpreting the Invisible and Undervalued: Nursing Heritage

This presentation shares the activities of a team of public history and medical museum professionals and nurses collaborating on a range of projects engaging with historical objects collected by the Dutch Museum of Nursing. Although no longer accessible in a physical museum setting, the collections are used in nurse education, for historical research (and increasingly in connection with research into contemporary issues in nursing), and for public engagement.

The group is engaging with various conference themes including Medical object meanings: single versus ensembles/collections; Fostering multisensory / multimodal engagement with specific medical objects; and Evocative medical objects in teaching and outreach. Their projects also tackle challenges related to the invisible and undervalued work of nursing, historical stereotypes of nursing work that undermine recruitment and retention of nurses, and uses of heritage collections to prepare for and inform the changing future of healthcare.

The presentation will discuss how these issues are addressed through specific objects in the collection, including everyday and non-medical items and historical images and sound recordings, as well as a range of strategies, such as object-based learning, artistic co-creation, and embodied and sensory engagement. Topics addressed include using the history of psychiatric nursing in suicide prevention, collecting and presenting the community-based work of district nurses, and engaging with the history of nurse activism to inform nursing leadership and support healthcare policy advocacy.

CONTACT

Manon Parry
University of Amsterdam
e-mail: m.s.parry@uva.nl

Harriet Jackson

Opening the Conversation: Examining the Value and Challenges of Representing Pregnancy Loss within a National Museum Collection

Museum objects have powerful potential for emotional connection. This can be transformative for topics which have long been stigmatised and silenced, such as pregnancy loss. The baby loss charity Tommy's estimate that around 1 in 4 pregnancies in the UK are affected by pregnancy loss or neonatal death. Despite this and recent efforts to change perceptions, there is still significant taboo around pregnancy loss in the UK.

The Science Museum has a large and varied medical collection, however, it has historically contained very few objects which speak to lived experience of pregnancy loss. In 2021, the Science Museum Group collected three sizes of memory boxes from Simpson's Memory Box Appeal (SiMBA) and a pregnancy loss card developed by the Miscarriage Association and sold by Card Factory.

In this paper, I will consider how the acquisition of these objects has changed the way that pregnancy loss is represented in the museum. I will explore what we can learn from their materiality, their significance as memorials, and what it means for them to be part of a museum collection. More broadly, I will consider what it means for museums to responsibly care for these objects: from the potential impact on staff, to the challenges of displaying and interpreting them, both physically and online, to the opportunities they present to feature diverse, marginalised, and underrepresented voices. They offer a powerful opportunity to consider: can collecting and showcasing objects like these really challenge stigma? What value do they hold and to whom?

CONTACT

Harriet Jackson
Science Museum, London
e-mail: harriet.jackson@ScienceMuseum.ac.uk

Sophie Goggins
Nicky Reeves

Sensitive not Sensational. Displaying and Interpreting the Gravid Uterus Casts

This joint panel will discuss the challenges and opportunities of displaying and interpreting a group of sensitive objects, the series of plaster casts taken from the dissections of unknown women, at different stages of their pregnancies, created for William Hunter in the 1750s.

The Hunterian Collection possesses 11 life size plaster casts that entered the collection with the gift of William Hunter in 1807. This series of casts of dissections of unknown women shows the pregnant uterus, as illustrated in Hunter's, 'The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures' (1774). These casts have been displayed in permanent, and temporary, spaces over the last decade at the Hunterian (Glasgow), Yale Center for British Art and National Museums Scotland in ways which have divided opinion. The objects, and knowledge about their production, generate discourse around consent, sexual violence and graphic content. Whilst not human remains, their inclusion, and interpretation, in displays and exhibitions continues to be contentious.

The most recent display of one cast, at National Museums' Scotland Anatomy exhibition, was informed by discussions and research sharing with colleagues at the Hunterian. This panel will bring together curators who have helped to display, and teach about, these casts to discuss their challenges, lessons learnt and the power of collaboration.

CONTACT

Sophie Goggins | National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh | e-mail: s.goggins@nms.ac.uk
Nicky Reeves | Hunterian Museum & Art Gallery, Glasgow | e-mail: Nicky.Reeves@glasgow.ac.uk

Johanna Kreil

From Travelling Fairground Show to Museum Collection: What Wax Models Can Tell us about the Origin, History and Conservational Needs of an Anatomical Panopticon

In 2009, the German Hygiene-Museum Dresden acquired an anatomical panopticon with around 100 wax models that illustrate the healthy and pathologic human body as well as its embryonic development, childbirth and surgery. Since its assembly in the 1850s, this rare collection was owned by travelling showmen, who presented the wax models on fairgrounds as a means of public health education and for entertainment.

In recent years, the panopticon has been the subject of systematic research and conservation treatment for the first time. Its eventful history was reconstructed with the help of archival material and through interviews with the former proprietors. Important additional information was gained through a close inspection of the models themselves and the traces they reveal of their past. The model makers could be identified through technological investigations and comparison with waxn objects preserved elsewhere, which show similar specific characteristics and thus speak in favour of a provenance from the same workshop. Most of the modellers were so far unknown and the Dresden inventory was therefore a starting point for research into their biographies and working techniques. Some models were very fragile and showed severe damage. The cause of the damages could be explained with the help of material analyses and X-ray examinations, as well as with the new insights into the history of the collection and the manufacturing techniques of the models. Furthermore, the need for conservation but also the limits of conservation treatment could be defined on this basis.

CONTACT

Johanna Kreil
Technical University Munich
e-mail: restaurierung@johanna-kreil.de

Michael Geiges

Immunotherapy, Radiotherapy, Experimental Infections: Wax Moulages as Individual Patient Documents and Starting Point for Medical-historical Research

Wax moulages are three-dimensional replicas of diseased body surfaces, molded with a wax mixture over a plaster cast taken directly from the patient. They are primarily known as dermatological teaching aids from the first half of the 20th century, the period after the establishment of dermatology as a medical specialty and before the development of practicable color photography. They often show typical findings and represent a dermatological clinical picture, while the individual patient behind the object disappears in the context of the teaching collection.

Only in recent years have contributions from the Zurich Moulage Museum drawn attention to the historical significance of moulages as research documents and thus also moved the patient depicted in the moulage to the center of perception and research.

The starting point for these investigations were moulages which, for various reasons, do not fit into the image of a typical teaching collection. These include moulage no. 189, which shows mycosis of the toes. Here it was the labelling that prompted further research: experimental mycosis of the foot. It tells the story of 17-year-old Martha H., who was forcibly hospitalized in the dermatology clinic in 1929 as a (supposed) prostitute, presumably for the treatment of gonorrhea. Further research revealed that the majority of the more than 2000 wax moulages were produced in Zurich as research documents and were only later incorporated into the teaching collection. Today, the moulage as a witness to individual patient fates serves as a starting point for discussions and further research on topics such as the history of informed consent, patient trials in dermatology, dealing with vulnerable people in medicine or the image of women in medicine.

CONTACT

Michael Geiges
Museum of Wax Moulages, Zurich
e-mail: michael@geiges.ch

Tiphaine Lours

The Plaster Casts of Pierre, Emile, and Jean-Baptiste: Exploring the History of Grafted Soldiers in WWI from Below

The collection of plaster casts of "Gueules Cassées" produced by the stomatologist Albéric Pont during the First World War, currently kept in the storage area of the Hospices Civils de Lyon Museum, has already been the subject of several academic studies (Depigny 1976, Mazaleigue-Labaste 2017). These works have examined the collection as a whole, notably assessing the originality of Pont's surgical practices in comparison with the facial reconstruction techniques used in other French maxillofacial centers during the war.

Departing from this approach, this paper focuses on only three specific casts from the museum, representing anonymous soldiers who suffered severe nasal injuries. Drawing on a variety of sources produced by Pont between 1914 and 1918, which are scattered across multiple institutions in Lyon and Paris, I was able to identify these men and trace their medical journeys, as well as the operations they underwent. Pierre Thomas, Emile Thorens, and Jean-Baptiste Richard thus shed new light on the history of tissue grafts during the First World War: their faces set in plaster provide insight into the types of injuries that surgeons like Pont sought to treat with these specific techniques. Moreover, their military records offer valuable information on the long-term outcomes of these skin and cartilage grafts and the impact of these operations on their post-war lives. By studying these three casts individually, this research therefore nuances the narrative constructed by Pont himself, which highlights the successes of his surgical practice. Since these pieces remain in storage, a reflection is now necessary on the museography that could be implemented to once again exhibit these casts to the public.

CONTACT

Tiphaine Lours
Center for History, Sciences Po Paris
e-mail: tiphaine.lours@sciencespo.fr

Rebecca Lush

Trauma-Informed Object-based Learning with Pathology Specimen Collections

Object-based learning (OBL) has long been a valuable approach in museums and collections, allowing for immersive, hands-on experiences that enhance both engagement and understanding. In the context of pathology specimen collections, this can provide rich, multifaceted learning opportunities. This presentation will explore how object-based learning can be applied to specimen collections to deepen an understanding of health and disease, while also fostering new avenues for outreach. In addition, it will cover how a trauma-informed object-based learning framework can be applied to reduce the risk involved.

As Curator of the Integrated Pathology Learning Centre (IPLC), I will select case studies from our museum to demonstrate how specimens can be used not only as teaching tools but also as powerful vehicles for engagement with broader audiences. At its core, our work allows for dynamic outreach, connecting the public with diverse aspects of medical history and discovery in ways that are both personal and impactful.

The presentation will address the challenges and opportunities inherent in the use of medical specimens in object-based learning, particularly in relation to their preservation, interpretation, and contextualization. It will also touch on the work involved in managing these collections and how it contributes to a deeper understanding of the specimens themselves, enriching educational and outreach efforts. Ultimately, object-based learning in specimen collections offers powerful, tangible ways to connect audiences with the complexities of medicine and healthcare.

CONTACT

Rebecca Lush
Integrated Pathology Learning Centre, Queensland, Australia
e-mail: r.lush@uq.edu.au

Marion Hulverscheidt
Andreas Winkelmann

Gall Skulls in Medical Museums and Anatomical Collections

This presentation focuses on so-called Gall skulls, which are present in many medical history museums and anatomical collections. Gall's skulls are material relics of a brain and skull theory, which assign certain characteristics, traits and talents of an individual person to an area of the skull or an underlying brain area. This localization theory from the age of enlightenment is now obsolete, but the remaining material witnesses – the inscribed skulls – are still fascinating. In addition to real skulls, models made of other materials – plaster or paper-mâché – were also made and preserved.

The Berlin anatomical collection includes a "Gall skull". A debate about its possible inclusion in a large-scale science exhibition triggered provenance research into this "anatomical object". The research included anthropological, historical and museological approaches. The anthropological investigation produced the unexpected result that the object stems from two individuals, as the mandible does not fit the rest of the skull. Based on an inscribed collection number, the historical collection context could be partially reconstructed despite lost catalogues. This narrowed the accession period down to the early 1830s, while the exact provenance remained elusive.

The combination of human remains from two individuals demonstrates that the creators of this specimen were not interested in individual fates but in generalizable statements about "the" human body, using the sheer materiality of human remains. It is debatable whether today's concepts of individual autonomy and consent should take precedence over these historical concepts. The display may even be an opportunity to focus on the historical variability of approaches to the ambiguities of the human body and thus to learn something about the past and the present.

CONTACT

Marion Hulverscheidt | University of Kassel
e-mail: hulverscheidt@uni-kassel.de

Andreas Winkelmann | Medical School Brandenburg, Neuruppin
e-mail: andreas.winkelmann@mhb-fontane.de

Michael Sappol

Endangered Specimens, Unaccountable Objects. Medico-historical Collections and Human Biomaterial: Competing ethical claims, phenomenological effects, and the historical commons

Historical medical collections are in crisis. Administrators don't love them; critics vilify them. There are calls to disperse, repatriate or destroy the old specimens, or drastically restrict access. The fetuses, tumors, skulls and slices – obtained long before protocols of informed consent became standard – are increasingly targets of a symbolic politics that mixes moral outrage with a reflexive condemnation of voyeurism and objectification.

The objects show difficult things – dissected-out structures, malformations, and the terrible work that disease, decay, violence, and accident do to us. And show wonderful things – the work, ingenuity and advances of science and the healing professions over the centuries. But also carelessness, abuse, exploitation, elitism. It's an ambivalent, ambiguous legacy. Current bioethical protocols dictate that we shouldn't make and collect such things without informed consent. So what moral calculus should govern us in current museological practice? What are specimens and collections good for?

Focusing on "The Punished Suicide" (1863), a particularly difficult object, and other specimens from Museo Morgagni (Padua) and Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), this paper sorts through competing ethical claims for and against the preservation and exhibition of historical medical collections and their human biomaterials.

It lands with an ethos of open-access stewardship. Specimens, it argues, are not just "human remains", but historical artifacts, valuable relics of the history of medicine, science, and embodied human experience, an idiosyncratic and uniquely valuable archive of nation, colonialism, capitalism, race, gender, class, disability, illness, death, difference and aesthetics. And something unaccountable that exceeds all of those categories....

CONTACT

Michael Sappol
University of Uppsala
e-mail: mike.sappol@gmail.com

Sonja Marschall
Marion Maria Ruisinger

„Heart of the Matter. Medical Specimens in the Museum“. First Results of the Online Visitor Survey

The exhibition “Heart of the Matter” (2.4.2025-11.1.2026) in the German Museum for the History of Medicine (DMMI), Ingolstadt, has been partly inspired by the lively discussions about the ethics of caring for human remains at the IAMMC conference in Leiden 2023. The DMMI holds only a few specimens in its own collection. It is housed, however, in the former anatomy building of Ingolstadt University, which was used from 1735 to 1800 for the research of and the teaching with the human body. Therefore, the history of anatomy plays as major role in its research as in the museum displays. The question of how to exhibit human specimens in a way that respects ethical aspects, the needs of the object and the interest of our visitors equally, has been crucial for the re-design of the permanent exhibition in 2020 and has become a discussion point for the museum team ever since.

While public and scholarly debate regarding the public display of human specimens has traditionally focused on normative issues, little is known about how visitors actually perceive and process such displays in the museum context. This is where the exhibition “Heart of the Matter” wants to shed some light. It invites the visitors to engage with specimens first in their primary contexts of a teaching collection and then in six different museum presentation contexts (“history”, “biography”, “body donation”, “preparation techniques”, “research”, “alternatives”). Finally, the visitors are invited to fill in a standardized online questionnaire which investigates their emotional engagement and their cognitive reflection. This quantitative study is shaped and conducted by Sonja Marschall as part of her bachelor’s thesis in Media and Communication Studies. The questionnaire includes demographic data, evaluations of the exhibition, and self-reported emotional and cognitive responses to healthy versus pathological specimens. In this talk, she will present her first results.

CONTACT

Sonja Marschall | University of Leipzig
e-mail: sonjamarschall02@gmail.com

Marion Maria Ruisinger | German Museum for the History of Medicine, Ingolstadt
e-mail: marion.ruisinger@ingolstadt.de

Rainer Brömer

Provenance Research on Human Fetuses: Single Objects or Ensemble?

Since 2023, wet specimens of human fetuses in the anatomy collection of Marburg University have been studied as part of an interdepartmental research project with the aim to develop an ethically grounded concept for the preservation, documentation, and possible future uses of sensitive objects held in various university collections. While the provenance of each individual member of the collection should first be established, this expectation is often impossible to fulfill, especially for an anatomical collection due to its particular nature, having been set up and preserved in accordance with the daily requirements of research and teaching, dependent upon the access to human bodies. As biomedical research and teaching depend on series of organisms of different age (whose provenance was of no concern to the physicians at the time), it is unsurprising to find, e.g., collectively preserved sets of fetuses with no specific documentation attached.

How can we try to establish the provenance of these ensembles of organisms? In many (most?) cases, the best we can hope for is to clarify the general circumstances of their communal origin by reconstructing the conditions under which fetuses would have been appropriated. Archival and public records, legal regulations, and academic publications as well as recorded public controversies are providing some insights into the processes leading to their acquisition. As a result, an overall assessment of the ethical quandaries of retaining human remains for research and display can be attempted even where the provenance of individual human organisms and their parts cannot be established.

CONTACT

Rainer Brömer
University of Marburg
e-mail: Rainer.Broemer@uni-marburg.de

Cat Irving

The Tales They Can Tell: Individual Stories and Social Histories in Surgeons' Hall Museums' Collection

Surgeons' Hall Museums holds one of the largest collection of human remains demonstrating surgical pathology. Behind each item of human tissue in the collection is an individual story.

This paper will examine some of these stories, and the way that a piece of preserved human tissue can act as a gateway to generate knowledge about personal stories and give insight into larger social histories. Planned provenance research into the collection will aid in the elucidation of these histories, and give insights into the way such collections were acquired. By thinking about the lives of the people whose remains are in our collection we can give them agency, transforming them from being simply a didactic teaching object, and helping to restore their individuality. We have to acknowledge that this is not a complete process, and, however well-intentioned, we are still only getting a partial picture of their lives which will itself be coloured by our own experiences. Collaboration between institutions can create a larger context for understanding these individual experiences, and the IAMMC provides a setting to open up a dialogue to facilitate such partnerships.

CONTACT

Cat Irving
Surgeons' Hall Museums, Edinburgh
e-mail: C.Irving@rcsed.ac.uk

Sabina Carraro
Johanna Stierlin

Searching for the Individual by Accessing the Past

The Institute of Evolutionary Medicine (IEM) at the University of Zurich houses an important collection of historical human remains, comprising around 20,000 specimens, mainly of Swiss origin. This collection includes dry and wet specimens, bones, tissue samples and a small group of mummies from pathology and forensic medicine dating from antiquity to the mid-20th century.

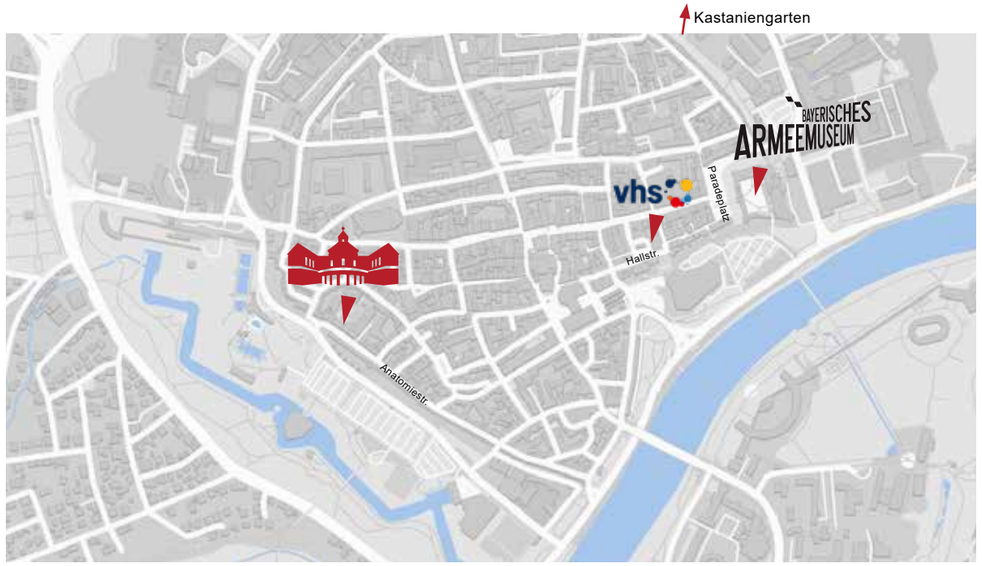
Between 2022 and 2024, the IEM developed a long-term database for the Human Remains Collection. The aim of this initiative was to digitally record all specimens to ensure the preservation of the collection and facilitate scientific collaboration and networking. The database adheres to the applicable data protection and ethical guidelines and makes the data accessible and usable for various interest groups. The linking of archive material such as historical labels and registers with the specimens enables new access to the history of the individuals.

The question of the individual behind historical human remains is exemplified by anatomical models from the medical collection of the Institute for the History of Medicine in Bern, which are now kept at the University of Zurich. These wax models from the late 19th century, which were produced by the Tramond workshop, contain human bone preparations. These human remains as well as the body casts used for fabrication refer to the individuals behind the models. While wet or dry specimens directly represent individuals, anatomical models with human remains present them in a more subtle but no less significant way.

CONTACT

Sabina Carraro | Medical Collection, University of Zurich
e-mail: sabina.carraro@iem.uzh.ch

Johanna Stierlin | Medical Collection, University of Zurich
e-mail: johanna.stierlin@iem.uzh.ch



Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum | Anatomiestraße 18-20, 85049 Ingolstadt
Volkshochschule (vhs) | Hallstraße 5, 85049 Ingolstadt
Bayerisches Armeemuseum | Paradeplatz 1, 85049 Ingolstadt
Kastaniengarten (restaurant) | Gutsstraße 4, 85055 Ingolstadt

TEAM INGOLSTADT

Sigrid Billig | Vera Haag | Christine Hofmann | Marion Maria Ruisinger | Elke Schlottermüller
Oliver Söllner | Alois Unterkircher | Lara Wendel

CONTACT

dmm@ingolstadt.de
tel. +49. 162. 2 10 67 63

GENERAL INFORMATION

Participants of the conference can visit the exhibitions of the German Medical History Museum free of charge.

IAMMC
International Association of
Medical Museums and Collections

Deutsches
Medizinhistorisches Museum

Deutsches
Medizinhistorisches Museum