

Dialogue 5

Over-Prescribed/Under-Medicated: History and Cultural Politics of Pain in America

Keith Wailoo, Ph.D.
Rutgers University

Noon, Friday, February 13, 2009
Mailman Center for Child Development, Room 3023

—————→ *No lunch will be provided – Bring your own lunch.* ←————

(No RSVPs required)

Access to pain medicine has always been controversial – in part because it has been a microcosm of broader cultural, political, and scientific debates across the nation. Over the past half-century, pain relief has touched on heated questions: What are the limits of patients’ rights to relief? What is the nature of addiction and does liberal pain relief create addiction? What to do when pain medicine may be used in physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia? What is the “reality” or clinical status of pain, and who is best positioned to assess pain – clinicians or patients? This historical talk frames America’s contemporary struggles over pain relief as part of a broader ongoing cultural and political debate over medical liberalism and conservatism, and examines the evolution of pain medicine in the context of the history of patients, doctors and social policy.

Dr. Wailoo is Martin Luther King Jr. Professor of History at Rutgers University with a joint appointment in the Department of History and the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research. He is founding director of the Center for Race and Ethnicity. His books include *The Troubled Dream of Genetic Medicine: Ethnicity and Innovation in Tay-Sachs, Cystic Fibrosis, Sickle Cell Disease* (coauthored with Stephen Pemberton, Johns Hopkins, 2006); *Dying in the City of the Blues: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race and Health* (UNC, 2001); and *Drawing Blood: Technology and Disease Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Johns Hopkins, 1997). He is also the editor of *A Death Retold: Jessica Santillan, the Bungled Transplant, and Paradoxes of Medical Citizenship* (with Julie Livingston and Peter Guarnaccia, UNC Press, 2006). He was elected in 2007 to the Institute of Medicine, one of the U.S. National Academies, where he also serves on the Health Sciences Policy Board.

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