

OLLI-Wilmington Course Proposal

Fall Semester 2026

Course Instructor: Hisham M.F. Sherif, MD, PhD

Course Title: "Understanding Medicaese: The Meaning of Some Common Medical terms"

Course Duration: 10 Weeks (2 5-Week Parts)

Course Description:

This course aims to explain the meaning and implications of several common medical terms. At the end of this course, members should be better informed about some of the words, terms and diagnoses they may hear from their healthcare professional or may read in the media. As a result, attendees will be more able to distinguish between evidence-based information and pseudoscience and misinformation. Thus, they will be empowered in taking charge of their own health, supporting safer, wiser decision making.

Lecture Titles and Descriptions:

Part I (5 Weeks):

1. "Normal Health":

This lecture discusses how to define "normal", and subsequently how to define "abnormal" or "sick". Taking examples from history, biology, physiology, we review the evolution, misunderstanding and deliberate abuse of such definitions throughout history and how their impact on clinical and public health practice.

2. "Wellness"

This lecture discusses the origins of the concept of Wellness throughout history, including the emergence and new popularity of "alternative medicine" practices and their lack of scientific basis as well as their risks, with comparisons with evidence-based healthcare.

3. "Healthcare Provider"

A discussion of the history and evolution of practitioners of healing and medicine; from ancient civilizations until current times. Including an overview of the education, training, skill development, credentialing and licensing of such practitioners. Also included is a discussion of the non-physician healthcare providers and their role in practice.

4. "Guidelines":

A discussion of the basics of medical decision making as guided by medical ethics, and founded upon fundamentals of information engineering. The lecture also discusses the impetus, evolution, process and impact of evidence-based Clinical Practice Guidelines by the professional medical organizations.

5. "Life Support":

In this lecture, we discuss the basic physiologic processes responsible for maintaining survival and state of health. We also discuss the levels of severity of disease processes, and the requirement for escalating pharmaceutical and mechanical support of vital functions.

Part II (5 Weeks):

6. "Hysteria"

This lecture offers an overview of the disparities, shortcomings and abuse that women have been subjected to when medical care is needed. Issues such as prevalent, misguided and prejudiced concepts and myths about female anatomy and physiology; through lack of scientific research of, by and for women; as well as unique physiologic and psychosocial factors affecting women's health.

7. "Adiposity"

This lecture discusses the global epidemic of obesity: Definitions; clinical assessment; distribution, types and functions of the adipose tissue; impact on the body systems with focus on the inflammatory response and its impact on cardiovascular, metabolic and neuroscience disease.

8. "Infection":

An overview of the evolution of understanding of the cause of illness, since ancient times to the emergence of the Germ Theory and current understandings. Examples of some notable infections that have impacted a significant number of people throughout the centuries are also provided.

9. "Blockage":

A discussion of the physiologic basis for metabolism and energy production, based on adequate supply of oxygenated blood to tissues and organs. Also, an overview of Atherosclerosis as the main cause for progressive narrowing of the arterial system, with focus on the impact on important arterial systems such as the coronaries, cerebral arteries and peripheral arterial disease.

10. "A-Fib"

This is a discussion of the basic concepts in how the heart rhythm is generated; including conduction pathways and the electrocardiogram (ECG); the different abnormal rhythms with focus on the anatomic, physiologic, clinical picture, stroke risk, strategy for treatment planning and current guidelines for atrial fibrillation.