

HUMAN CURIOSITIES RESEARCH PROJECT: MID-WAY RESULTS

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This presentation reports on the key findings so far from the speaker's 4-year research project on the social relevance of European medical museum (funded by a €315,000 grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research). While the collections of medical museums, including human remains, are sometimes labeled as "curiosities," the project title refers instead to the idea that it is entirely human to be curious about bodies and that curators can harness that interest in socially-useful ways. Parry is studying, in particular, the representation of sexuality and reproduction, mental health issues, infectious diseases, and race, disability, and the life cycle. Output will include a book, an exhibition and an online tool experimenting with new strategies for interpreting medical heritage.

The speaker has conducted an online survey and is now visiting museums in various countries to interview staff and discuss the main challenges museums are facing and new strategies for exhibitions and public projects. In this presentation she will discuss her preliminary findings and invite feedback, as a means to share the research results and to gain guidance for the next phase. This meeting is going to happen mid-way through the project, providing the opportunity for conference attendees to set priorities for the next phase.

This presentation fits well within the "Publics" strand as it addresses the various audiences medical museums are reaching, as well as uses of medical collections for such diverse publics. The project themes also connect to the relevance of the collections for everyday life, and for fostering citizen

engagement with science. The results illustrate the different ways museums are approaching controversial topics, raise questions about the status of medical history in different country contexts, and provide an interesting variety of views on the role of the museum in intervening in contemporary issues.