

**ENGAGEMENT:**

**MEDICAL HISTORY MUSEUMS COMMUNICATING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

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In the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne, *Strategic Plan, Beyond 2018*, the Faculty museums and collections are specifically mentioned for the first time as the direct result of a series of exhibitions held at the Medical History Museum. The museums and collections are included in the Engagement objective, “to expand the university’s support for public debate and discussion of important health issues, utilising the Faculty’s extensive museum collections to support public engagement.”

This paper examines the exhibition *The cancer puzzle: patterns, paradoxes and personalities* held at the Medical History Museum (June 2017 to March 2018) and how this exhibition strategically engaged with different kinds of publics. It exemplifies the power of objects to assist in telling the history of medicine in the context of challenge and change. It reveals how material from key public collections such as documents, art, objects and equipment may be utilised to illustrate in an intimate and edifying manner the complexity of change in medicine and communicate with a range of publics including students, the general public and institutional partners such as hospitals, research institutes and advocacy groups.

The exhibition coincided with the opening of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre (VCCC), a facility that brought together leading clinical, research and education services from major hospitals, research

institutes and the University of Melbourne. The Medical History Museum partnered with these hospitals and research institutions bringing together their stories and journeys of discovery in the field of cancer including discussion of controversial issues.

*The cancer puzzle* exhibition explored the roles of key individuals, institutions, public education campaigns and cutting-edge research. Personal responses of people with cancer were expressed through the art of artists who have cancer using contemporary art to communicate with the public. Exhibits powerfully linked the past, present and future and the complex journey of change and communicated the health messages associated with cancer. It strengthened existing partnerships and communicated important health issues to students and the broader community confirming the museum's public engagement role.