

Intersections of Literature and Medicine: Exploring Narrative Insights into Health and Illness

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Abstract: The interdisciplinary convergence of literature and medicine constitutes a significant domain within the field of medical humanities, offering a nuanced framework for examining human perceptions of health, illness, and healing. Literary texts serve as interpretive mediums through which the embodied, emotional, psychological, and socio-cultural dimensions of illness are articulated, often extending beyond the reductionist paradigms of biomedical discourse. Through narrative structures, metaphor, symbolism, and character development, literature provides insight into lived experiences of suffering, recovery, stigma, caregiving, and mortality. This research paper critically explores how literary representations of health and illness contribute to a deeper understanding of the human condition. By analyzing selected literary works across historical and contemporary contexts, the study investigates how narratives reflect and shape societal attitudes toward disease, disability, mental health, and medical authority. These portrayals illuminate prevailing cultural beliefs, ethical dilemmas, power dynamics in clinical practice, and evolving perceptions of patient identity. The paper also examines the role of narrative in medicine, emphasizing the significance of storytelling as a tool for empathy development, reflective practice, and patient-centered care. Within clinical education, narrative competence enhances physicians' ability to interpret patient accounts, recognize emotional cues, and appreciate the subjective dimensions of illness. Literary inquiry therefore complements biomedical training by fostering ethical sensitivity, cultural awareness, and compassionate engagement. Furthermore, the study engages with modern theoretical perspectives, including phenomenology, narrative ethics, and social constructivism, to analyze how illness narratives construct meaning and mediate experiences of vulnerability and resilience. Contemporary discussions surrounding chronic illness, mental health representation, pandemics, and disability studies are incorporated to demonstrate literature's continuing relevance in interpreting medical realities.

Keywords: Medical Humanities, Health Humanities, Illness Narratives, Wellbeing, Society

I. INTRODUCTION

Exploring the intricate relationship between health and illness through literature provides an intense understanding of human experiences and societal perceptions. Literature offers a unique lens to scrutinise the multifaceted nature of health, presenting narratives that illuminate the physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions of illness. By delving into literary works, we can uncover the diverse ways in which health and illness are portrayed, understood, and experienced across different cultures and periods. This research paper aims to analyse these literary depictions, shedding light on the broader implications for the medical humanities and the role of storytelling in shaping our comprehension of health and disease.

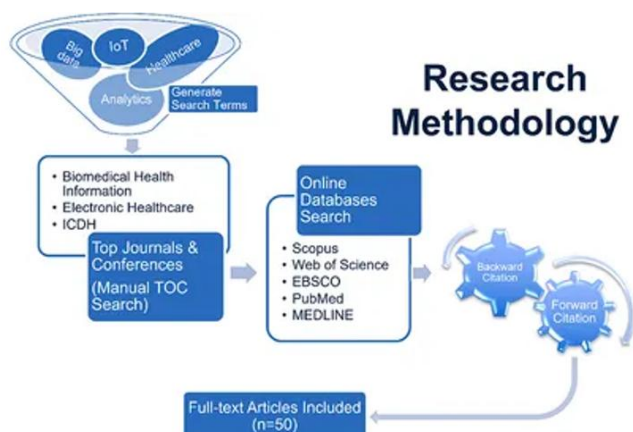
Comprehension of health and illness through literature tends to provide profound insights into human endurance and

societal perceptions. Literary works dispense a significant perspective on the multifaceted nature of health, shedding light on narratives that delve into the physical, emotional, and psychological facets of illness. By assessing literature from assorted cultures and periods, this dissertation seeks to uncover different portrayals and interpretations of health and illness. These literary depictions elucidate broader ramifications for the medical humanities and draw attention to the importance of tale-telling in sculpting our perceptions of health and disease. This is the thing that showcases the critical role the manuscript plays in deepening our insight and regard for the complexities of vitality, health and illness.

The intersection of literature and medicine bestows a rich realm for scrutinising human expertise in health and illness. This research paper explores how literature captures the complexity of these experiences, offering insight that is esteemed by both

medical professionals and the public. Health and illness have been central themes in literature for centuries. They are delved not only as physical conditions but also as metaphors for various facets of human existence. To fathom how literary works depict health and illness and what these depictions reveal about societal attitudes, medical practices, and the human condition. This paper will interpret select literary works, explore the role of literature in medicine, and discuss contemporary perspectives on the portrayal of health and illness in literature.

Literature and Medicine, an academic journal initiated in 1982, is devoted to scrutinising the intersections between literary and medical acquaintances. The journal implements literary and cultural texts to explore themes related to illness, trauma, the human body, and disparate medical issues. Offerings to the journal come from experts from one side to the other in a range of spheres in both medicine and the humanities and social sciences. Each year, the journal publishes two concerns: one generic and one thematic. Early literary works, such as Homer's Iliad and Sophocles' Philoctetes, address themes of disease and healing. Medieval literature works like Chaucer's Canterbury Tales include references to plague and other illnesses, reflecting the medical knowledge and practices of the time. Renaissance and Enlightenment literature from this period, including Shakespeare's plays and Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year, explores the impact of epidemics and the human response to illness.



Disease as metaphor, illness is often used metaphorically to explore fringe motifs such as morality, social decay, and existential angst. Mental health literary works constantly address mental illness, offering insights into societal interpretation and the personal experiences of those affected. Healing and recovery stories of healing confer a narrative framework for understanding the journey from illness to health. The Plague by Albert Camus

AR a philosophical novel that examines human resilience and solidarity in the face of a deadly epidemic A novella that explores the existential crisis of a terminally ill man. Wit by Margaret Edson is a play that portrays the experience of a woman undergoing cancer treatment, highlighting the intersections of literature, illness, and empathy.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Plague by Albert Camus is set in the Algerian city of Oran. This novel follows the lives of various characters as they confront a devastating plague. The randomness of suffering, the struggle for meaning, and the importance of human solidarity. Camus uses the plague as a metaphor for the absurdity of life and the inherent struggle for survival and meaning. Leo Tolstoy's renowned novella, The Death of Ivan Illich. The story of Ivan Illich, a high-ranking judge who faces a terminal illness and reflects on his life. The inevitability of death, the search for authenticity, and the failure of superficial societal values. Tolstoy critiques the artificiality of bourgeois life and emphasises the importance of genuine human connections. Wit by Margaret Edson, the play chronicles the final days of a literature professor diagnosed with terminal ovarian cancer. The clinical detachment of medical professionals, the isolation of the patient, and the redemptive power of empathy. Edson juxtaposes the intellectual rigour of the protagonist with the emotional vulnerability brought on by her illness.

Patient experiences literature perception is a platform for patients to share their stories, offering insights into their subjective competence. Physician perspectives, literary works written by medical professionals, such as William Carlos Williams and Atul Gawande, offer a unique vantage point on the practice of medicine. Empathy development: reading about health and illness in literature helps medical professionals and the public develop empathy for those who are suffering. Narrative Medicine, the use of storytelling in medicine, can enhance the doctor-patient relationship and improve healthcare outcomes. Therapeutic reading bibliotherapy, the use of literature for therapeutic purposes, has been shown to help patients cope with illness and improve mental health. Reflective practice literature encourages healthcare providers to reflect on their practice and consider the emotional and ethical dimensions of their work. Modern literature contemporary authors writers such as Paul Kalanithi (When Breath Becomes Air) and Siddhartha Mukherjee (The Emperor of All Maladies) continue to explore health and illness in nuanced ways. Diverse voices literature now includes a broader range of involved perspectives, including

those of marginalised communities and patients alongside chronic illnesses. Cultural narratives in different cultures have unique ways of understanding and representing health and illness in literature. Cross-cultural comparison assessing literature from various cultures can reveal commonalities and deviations in how societies tactics health and illness.

The advent of digital technology has influenced the way health and illness are portrayed in literature, with new forms such as blogs and online memoirs. Future trends, emerging technologies like virtual reality and AI, are beginning to shape the literary representation of medical experiences. Literature provides a valuable lens through which to understand the complexities of health and illness. It offers insights into patient experiences, medical practices, and societal attitudes. The Intersection of literature and medicine can enhance empathy, improve healthcare, and enrich our understanding of the human condition. The Interdependency between literature and medicine offers penetrating insights into the human acquaintance with health, illness, and the practice of medicine. Literature bestows a rich repository of narratives that reflect the intricacies of medical practice and the lived experiences of patients. By perusing literary works, one can gain a deeper perception of the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of health and disease, which are often neglected in clinical practice. Literature has ceaselessly been a mirror to society, emulating its values, trepidations and desires. The correlation between literature and medicine can be traced back to ancient times, with texts like the Hippocratic Corpus and Galen's jotting blending medical knowledge with narrative elements.

Narrative medicine is a medical tactic that utilises people's narratives in clinical execution, research and education to stimulate healing. It endorses the value of stories in forthcoming patients' experiences and bolsters empathy among healthcare. Purveyor Works like "The Illness Narratives" by Arthur Kleinman highlight how narratives can silhouette our understanding of illness. Illness as metaphor Susan Sontag's "Illness as Metaphor" explores how language and metaphors used in literature can shape perceptions of diseases like tuberculosis and cancer. This book explains how literary analysis can reveal the cultural and emotional essentials of medical conditions. Case studies in literature, assorted literary works, convey case studies of medical conditions and their impact on entities and society. For example: "The Plague" by Albert Camus: This novel affords insights into the human retaliation to epidemic diseases. "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley: Inspect themes of scientific experimentation and its virtuous

implications. "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Robust portrayal of mental illness and the ramifications of inadequate medical treatment.

III. LITERATURE SURVEY

Literature can be used as a medium to explore ethical dilemmas in medicine. Stories that depict the feud faced by medical professionals and patients can foster a deeper discernment of ethical issues. For instance, *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro raises questions about the connection between medical ethics, cloning, and the value of human life. Empathy and Patient Care Alluring with literature can enrich the empathy of healthcare providers. By perusal of diverse experiences and perspectives, medical professionals can evolve a more all-encompassing approach to patient care. Rita Charon's work on narrative medicine reinforces the importance of chronicles in building patient-provider relationships. Cultural and Social Perspectives Literature proffers a window into the cultural and social dimensions of health and illness. Divulge how different societies understand and acknowledge medical confrontations. For instance, *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese provides a rich tapestry of medical executions in different cultural contexts. The Convergence of literature and medicine provides cherished insights into the human condition, empowering both fields. By blending literary assessment into medical education and practice, healthcare vendors can enhance their understanding of patients' experiences, preeminent to more compassionate and effective care. This paper focuses on exploring these themes, providing a comprehensive analysis of how literature and medicine enlighten and enrich each other.

Understanding health and illness through the prism of narrative illness endorses us scrutinising the immensely personal and subjective undertakings of individuals facing medical stipulations. These tactics emphasise the salience of storytelling in comprehending Intricacy's illness and the impact it has on people's lives. By surveying narratives of illness, we gain insight into the emotional, psychological, and social facets of health and disease. Fundamental concepts, personal stories, and narrative illness emphasise the personal stories of patients, bringing to the forefront their unique experiences and perspectives. These stories provide a rich source of insight into how individuals endure illness, the confrontation they face, and their journey towards healing. Emotional and psychological impact narratives of illness often delve into the emotional and psychological aspects of being unwell. They survey feelings of fear, anxiety, hope, and

resilience, tendering a window into the inner world of patients.

Doctor-patient relationship storytelling can elucidate the dynamics of the doctor-patient relationship, revealing the importance of empathy, communication, and trust in medical care. Using narratives, we can understand the experiences of both patients and healthcare providers. Cultural and social contexts: Illness narratives are sculpted by cultural and social contexts. They reflect how different societies fathom and respond to disease, and how factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status influence health experiences. Identity and illness narratives often examine how illness affects a person's sense of identity. They can unveil how individuals redefine themselves and their lives in the face of chronic or life-threatening conditions.

In literature, there exists a balance between counteractive forces such as right and wrong, good and evil, and light and darkness. This balance prolongs the state of living beings, where entities are either healthy or ill. Illness and wellness are both intrinsic parts of human endurance. Despite the universal aspiration for a life free from illness, no one has ever absconded from the inevitability of disease. One after another, sickness becomes an essential dimension of life's journey, strikingly impacting not only physical health but also emotional well-being.

In compliance with Mazurek (2015), chronic illness compels persons to re-evaluate their lives and self-perception. This phenomenon is depicted by American physician Mike Berry as "biographical disruption" (Bury, 2001; Mazurek, 2015). A biography narrates a person's life exploration, while turmoil refers to an interruption that averts normal activities. When illness disrupts an individual's life, it leads to what is termed biographical disruption.

Dissemination of their illness narratives offers some solace to individuals, allowing them to manifest their sorrows and experiences. These narratives, initially imparted by patients, are often supplemented by accounts from friends and family who chaperone them on their journey (Mazurek, 2015). Jurecic (2012) and Mazurek (2015) showcase that illness narratives—autobiographical accounts spoken or written by patients—help restore the lost biographical Uninterrupted and adapt to life's harsh practicality. These narratives can take the form of written biographies, autobiographies, or oral accounts in everyday conversations, providing a deeper fathom of the illness and its causes (Mazurek, 2015).

Holistic Perspective Narratives offer a holistic perspective on illness, encompassing not just the medical component but also the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. This approach recognises the unified person, not just their disease. Conveyance and rejuvenation, powerful storytelling can be a tool for communication and healing. Patients who allocate their stories often find it therapeutic, while the perceiver can gain valuable intuition and learn to render better support. Cultural Awareness Examining narratives from eclectic cultural backgrounds fosters cultural awareness and competence, helping healthcare surveyors understand and respect divergent health beliefs and practices. Through the Inspection of health and illness through the literature by spectating and analysing personal stories, we can gain a deeper comprehension of the human experience of disease, the impact of cultural and social contexts, and the importance of empathy and communication in healthcare. Narrative illness brings out the potency of storytelling as a tool for understanding, healing, and connection. The Analysis of health and illness through literature puts forward a profound perspective on the human condition. Literary narratives provide a multifaceted understanding of how people and societies perceive and avert illness. This investigation targets the examination of the representation of illness in literature, drawing attention to its psychological, cultural, and social dimensions.

Literary endeavours from miscellaneous eras reflect the transforming understanding of health and illness. From the portrayal of the plague in Daniel Defoe's "A Journal of the Plague Year" to the analysis of mental health in Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar," literature has always been a mirror to the medical acumen and societal attitudes of its time. Literature scripts meticulously deeply into the psychological impact of illness. Characters' experiences with diseases often serve as metaphors for emotional and mental struggles, bestowed upon readers epiphanies in the elaboration of the human psyche. For instance, Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway inspects the effects of shell shock and depression, providing a window into the inner turmoil of its characters. Disparate cultures interpret and respond to illness in a one-of-a-kind way, and literature. Encapsulates these different perspectives. Works like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "Love in the Time of Cholera" draw attention to the intersection of disease, love, and societal norms, revealing how cultural surroundings shape the experience of illness.

Illness narratives often address the social stigma and discrimination associated with certain health conditions. Literature challenges these stereotypes and fosters empathy. For

prototypes, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* renders the tribulations of marginalised communities, emphasising the social contributors to health. Delving into health and illness through literature equips a holistic understanding of the human experience. Literary narratives enrich our comprehension of the psychological, cultural, and social dimensions of illness, underscoring the prominence of affinity and narrative competence in healthcare. By engaging with these narratives, we can foster a more benevolent and wide-ranging approach to health and illness.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Portrayal of Mental Illness, Classical Literature: Dissect characters like Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Amaze* or Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* to fathom how mental illness has been rendered historically. **Modern Novels:** Gaze at contemporary works such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, which dispense insights into the hurdles and acquaintance of entities with mental health issues. **Chronic Illness and Disability Memoirs and Autobiographies:** Books like *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* by Jean-Dominique Bauby, which depicts the author's life after a stroke, can give powerful firsthand personal narratives of chronic illness. **Fiction: Novels** like *Still Alice* by Lisa Geneva, which deals with Alzheimer's disease, can spotlight the repercussions of chronic illness on individuals and their families. **Narrative Medicine Personal Narratives:** Explore works like *The Illness Narratives* by Arthur Kleinman, which deliberates how personal stories of illness can provide insights into the patient's experience and elevate medical practice.

Appraise how literature is used in medical education to enlighten empathy and perceive patient expertise. **Trauma and Recovery War Literature:** Books like *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque can depict the physical and psychological trauma that soldiers experienced by soldiers. **Survivor Stories: Memoirs** such as *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls offer insights into taming personal trauma and adversity. **Cultural Perspectives on Health Postcolonial Literature:** Interpret works like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe to discern how colonialism impacted health and cultural implementation in varied societies. **Indigenous Narratives:** Look at literature by autochthonous authors, such as *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, to inspect traditional rejuvenation healing executions and cultural angles on health. **Gothic and Supernatural Elements Gothic Novels:** Stories like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be scrutinised to fathom how fears about science, medicine, and the

human body have been expressed through Gothic literature. **Supernatural Themes:** Works like *Dracula* by Bram Stoker can provide insights into cultural anxieties about disease and the unknown. **Graphic Novels and Critical Narratives:** Survey how graphic novels like *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi use ocular storytelling to delineate personal and cultural occurrences of health and illness. **Impact of the Media:** Analyse how these visual narratives sway public cognition of health and illness.

Health is an imperative aspect of human life, modifying not just our contentment but also how we function and engage within our communities. The survey of health and illness through literature offers unique opinions on these concepts, providing insights into the exploration and confrontation faced by entities and societies. The beliefs of health and ill health extend beyond the individual, enfolding a wide range of experiences and events. These concepts can be arduous to define and value, as their interpretations are often relative to social norms and circumstances. Therefore, different individuals, groups, and societies may have heterogeneous views on what constitutes illness and what they define as being in good health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) provides a broadly accepted definition of health in its Constitution, portraying it as "a state of finishing physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the deprivation of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946). This definition stimulates a holistic view of health, featuring mental and social aspects, and emphasises the prominence of overall well-being rather than just the absence of illness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an even broader perspective on health, seeing it as the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the entire community, not just the physical contentment of the entities (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party, 1989). An active relationship with the land is vital, as the health of the community's land significantly impacts people's health (Green, 2008). This angle takes a comprehensive strategy, considering the cyclical perception of life, death, and rebirth. Australia's Health 2014 adopts this expansive view of health, assimilating physical and mental aspects, as well as genetic, cultural, socioeconomic, and environmental determinants. It is anchored on many key concepts, such as health is a leading part of well-being, influencing how people feel and function. Health describes social and economic well-being. Health is not merely the absence of disease or injury, and there are disparate degrees of good health. Managing health involves promoting good health, identifying and managing risks, and averting disease. Disease processes can develop over several years before symptoms become apparent.

Through the frame of reference of literature, we gain a deeper fathom of health and illness, endorsing the diverse experiences and interpretations that configure our understanding of well-being.

In literature, it extends a penetrating way to explore health and illness, endowing insights into the personal and societal impacts of diseases. Here are certain fictional narratives. The *Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann is a novel that follows Hans Castorp, a young man who visits his cousin in a tuberculosis sanatorium in the Swiss Alps and ends up dwelling there for numerous years. The book inquires into an assortment of psychological and philosophical suggested involvement in illness and the sanatorium experience. Themes: Isolation, time, and the human condition in the face of prolonged illness. The *Fault in Our Stars*, by John Gere, a contemporary novel, tells the story of Hazel Grace Lancaster, a teenager living with cancer, and her relationship with Augustus Waters, another cancer patient. The book confers a touching narrative about living with terminal illness, love, and loss. Themes include mortality, the impact of illness on young lives, and the quest for meaning.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey is set in a mental institution. The story is narrated by a patient, Chief Broadben. It centres around the rebellious Randle P. McMurphy and his clash with the Repressive Nurse Ratched. The novel affords a critical view of psychiatric institutions and the treatment of mental illness. The themes are power, control, and the dehumanising effects of institutionalisation. "The Bell Jar" By Sylvia Plath a semi-autobiographical novel, trails Esther Greenwood, a young woman who struggles with severe depression. The story endows a raw and poignant depiction of mental illness and the societal pressures faced by women in the 1950s. Themes: Identity, mental health, and societal expectations. The *Plague* by Albert Camus. The novel is set in the Algerian city of Oran, which is hit by a deadly plague. It complies with the lives of various characters as they confront the outbreak. The book is a profound expedition of human resilience, solidarity, and the existential nature of suffering. Themes: human condition, absurdism, and collective retort to crisis. The *Elephant Man* by Bernard Pomerance this frolic tells the true story of Joseph Merrick, a man with severe physical deformities who becomes a sideshow attraction and later a subject of medical eagerness. The narrative ventures into themes of human elegance and the societal treatment of those who are different. Themes of compassion, exploitation, and the crusade for humanity in the face of physical discrepancy.

Literature has enduringly been a medium through which society reconnoitres the convolutions of health, illness, and the human condition. Fictional narratives about illness not only ruminate about societal attitudes towards disease but also about those attitudes. They convey a way to engage with the personal and emotional dimensions of illness that clinical representations often overlook. From ancient texts like the Greek tragedies to contemporary novels, the delineation of illness has evolved with medical lore and societal changes. In classical literature, diseases were often depicted as admonishments from the gods or as metaphors for moral corruption. The 19th century brought more nuanced and compassionate portrayals, reflecting advances in medical science and a growing erudition of psychological health factors.

Fictional accomplishments on illness can be broadly categorised into several themes. Medical Mysteries: these often gyrate around the diagnosis and treatment of scares or enigmatic diseases, showing the detective aspect involved in medicine. Psychological Illnesses: Narratives zeroing in on mental health issues, such as depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety, scrutinise the subjective experiences of the protagonists. Chronic and Terminal Illnesses: Stories of characters confronted with long-term or incurable diseases look into themes of resilience, identity, and mortality. The convergence of health and illness in literature allocates valuable insights into the human experience, granting perspectives that go beyond clinical definitions and statistics. Fictional illness narratives serve as formidable tools for empathy, social commentary, and public education.

V. CONCLUSION

In assessing health and illness through the lens of literature, we exhibit a multidimensional perspective that augments our understanding of these complex experiences. Literature provides a unique platform to survey the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of health and illness, presenting insights that complement scientific and medical knowledge. Through the portrayal of mental illness, chronic conditions, and disabilities, literature fosters empathy and challenges societal stereotypes. It brings to light the personal struggles and triumphs of entities, humanising the often-clinical facets of healthcare. Narrative medicine and personal memoirs showcase the importance of storytelling in healing. Exemplifying how patients and healthcare providers can affiliate on a deeper level. These narratives underscore the prominence of empathy, compassion, and effective communication in medical implementation. Furthermore, the representation of trauma and recovery in

literature unveils the resilience of the human spirit. It accumulates the importance of bolstering systems and the enduring hope that persists even in the face of adversity. Cultural vantages in literature offer a more comprehensive understanding of how health and illness are perceived and experienced across contrasting societies. These stories remind us that health is not only a biological condition but also a cultural construct swayed by social norms and values. By fusing insights from various literary genres, memoirs, fiction, graphic novels, and classic literature, we gain a comprehensive view of health and illness. This interdisciplinary approach enhances our ability to address health-related issues with sensitivity and depth, eventually aiding in a more holistic understanding of the human condition. In conclusion, literature serves as a robust tool for traversing the intricacies of health and illness. It bridges the gap between scientific knowledge and human experience, offering esteemed lessons that can inform both personal and professional practices in healthcare. As we persist in engaging with literary works, we broaden our perspective, cultivate empathy, and foster a deeper appreciation for the diverse experiences of health and illness in our world. The quest for health and illness through literature furnished a rich, multi-faceted viewpoint on human involvement and societal constructs. By assessing narratives and literary works, we gain intense insights into the cultural, psychological, and social attributes of health and disease. This technique allows us to understand not just the medical aspects, but also the personal and emotional journeys of individuals. The interweaving of literature and health brings to the forefront the importance of empathy, narrative Adequacy, and a holistic understanding in both healthcare and patient care. Through this scope, we can better be grateful for the complexity of health and illness, ultimately fostering a more tender-hearted and apprehension approach to medical practice.

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Citation of this Article:

Vaibav Suryavanshi, & Prof. Sharath. (2025). Intersections of Literature and Medicine: Exploring Narrative Insights into Health and Illness. *Current Journal of Engineering and Science Research*. 2(7), 26-33. Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47001/CJESR/2025.207005>

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