

# **CLINICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF FRAILITY: A DIALOGUE**

**BROCHER FOUNDATION, HERMANCE, SWITZERLAND**

**ORGANISERS: SUSAN PICKARD AND VICTORIA CLULEY**

**14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

## **DAY ONE**

**10 am – 12pm**

- **Session One: Unequal ageing, relationships of power and frailty**

This theme places power and inequalities at the heart of the category of frailty. It explores how clinical frailty reflects a deeper and more long-lasting social frailty, powerlessness and vulnerability and how the clinical and the social can be brought closer together in both care and cure. Inequalities of gender, poverty and race all increase the chances of becoming frail as does (lifelong) sexism, racism and the stress of poor life chances, unemployment and poor housing. How might we turn frailty into a discussion about our social responsibility for others?

**Prof Jay Banerjee, University of Leicester and University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust: ‘Frailty and social inequality from a coalface physician’**

**Dr Shibley Rahman, University College, London: ‘Living and dying are on a continuum, but limits on limits of control are potentially possible’**

**Dr Victoria Cluley, University of Nottingham and Prof Susan Pickard, University of Liverpool: ‘Frailty, successful ageing and ethnicity’.**

**2pm - 4pm**

- **Session Two: Turning the gaze on ‘frailty’ as a concept and technology**

This theme examines the new technologies of frailty and explores their association with new paradigms for the understanding of older bodies, old age, the relationship between health, illness and ageing and the passage through the life course. Questions to consider include: What understandings of the older body do the new technologies of frailty introduce and replace? How are these framed in medicine, public health, biology and biogerontology? How are they changing and evolving? What is the relationship between new technologies and broader cultural attitudes towards ageing?

**Dr Nolwenn Bühler, University of Lausanne: ‘New technologies of frailty: healthy ageing between biomedicine and public health’**

**Prof Tiago Moreira, University of Newcastle (via zoom): ‘Frailty after Covid: tracing emergent shifts through heterogeneous network mapping’**

**Dr Louise Tomkow, University of Manchester: ‘Frailty as a biopower: The case of rationing care for older people during the COVID-19 pandemic’**

**7pm Movie: Pandora’s Box**

## **DAY TWO**

**10am - 12pm**

- **Session Three: Social and philosophical concepts, methodologies and theories**

This theme looks at frailty through the lens of social, psychological and philosophical theories such as vulnerability, risk, abjection, aesthetics and personhood. Questions will include: what does frailty tell us about our views of the 'civilized body' in late modernity? How can ageing into deep old age be seen in terms other than failure? Can resilience and frailty co-exist? What views of personhood might underpin these revisions? Alternatively, how might we reclaim terms such as abjection or dependence and reconfigure them according to different ethics and life course values?

**Professor Carol Holland, University of Lancaster: 'Cognitive Frailty in older age: the role of psychological resilience and cognitive reserve in progression pathways.'**

**Professor Paul Higgs, University College, London: 'Frailty, the social imaginary of the Fourth Age and the moral imperative to care'**

**Dr Chao Fang, University of Liverpool: 'An existential encounter with frailty – a deep listening exercise on loss, regret, and loneliness in old age'**

**2pm - 4pm**

- **Session Four: Imaginaries and alternative imaginaries of the fourth age**

The fourth age has been associated with decay, senescence and dependence, a realm of such horror that it cannot be understood by those outside (Gilleard and Higgs, 2010). This theme explores how the fourth age has been represented in literature, film as well as philosophy and other texts. It asks: how do these representations shape the way we view social problems, and construct social policy, affecting older people (intersectionally) from the recent Covid-19 pandemic, to austerity and political change? How might we draw from alternative conceptions of deep old age in different cultural traditions beyond the west as well as through both historical and innovative contemporary approaches within the west?

**Professor Bev Clack, Oxford Brookes University: 'Enter the crone: wisdom and the ageing female body'**

**Dr Jason Danely, Oxford Brookes University: 'In Praise of Frailty: Anthropology of aesthetics in Japanese culture'**

**Dr Ulla Kriebner, Graz University: 'Turning the "insults of illness into privileges of being": Re-evaluating frailty in the "nursing home novel"'**

## **DAY THREE (morning only)**

- **Session Five: Frailty and the limits of human control - roundtable**

This theme sees frailty as an existential condition, something that is an intrinsic element of deep old age but one that contains meaning, value and wisdom of its own. Representing a 'shadow side' to our late modern values, the antithesis of what we admire, it contains a challenge to our institutions,

norms, virtues and ways of seeing. We ask: how should culture, medicine and society approach bodies on the margins of life and death?

- **Discussion on taking forward the network**
- **Lunch and close**