



# Poems FOR DOCTORS

A summary report on the online project  
developed in collaboration between  
the Scottish Poetry Library and the  
University of St Andrews School of Medicine

*Steve Smart, April 2020*



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*Medical student Ed Griffiths reading  
The Door by Miroslav Holub*



## Inception

Poems for Doctors is a collaboration between Scottish Poetry Library and the School of Medicine at the University of St Andrews. The project developed out of Tools of the Trade: Poems for new doctors, a small anthology of poems published by Scottish Poetry Library and gifted to graduating doctors. Poems for Doctors online built on the book.

*We were doing a lot on a shoestring with 'Tools of the Trade' and we simply didn't have the resources to develop something digital. The Dean of Medicine at St Andrews stepped in with an offer of the expertise of the School's Learning Technology team. I admit I thought it would be a pretty hard sell, but quickly realised that staff and students throughout the School were leading by example, and were happy to talk about how poems are a fluent part of reflecting on study and practice.*

Lilias Fraser, co-editor *Tools of the Trade* editions 1+2,  
former Projects Officer, Scottish Poetry Library



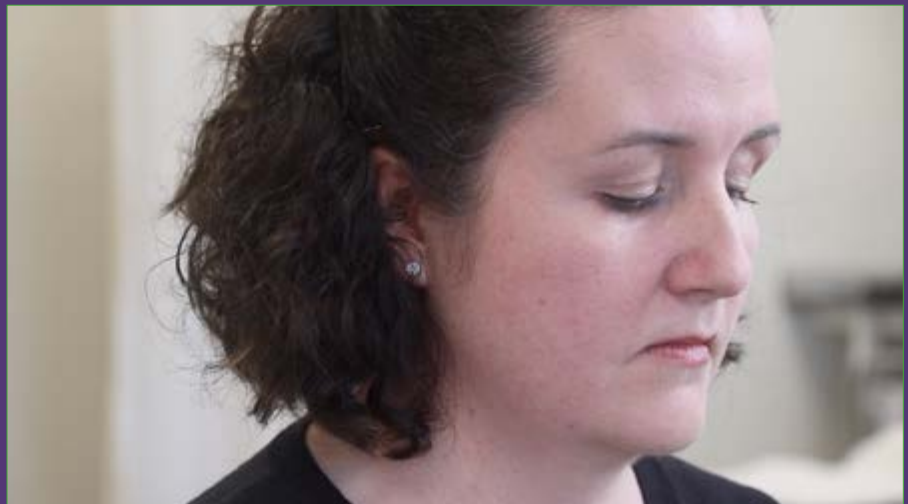
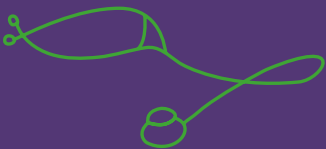
Dean of Medicine Prof David Crossman reading  
*Second Opinion* by Douglas Dunn



## Inception

Being a doctor is sometimes highly emotionally challenging. Doctors regularly share the most personal, vulnerable, and crucial moments of other people's lives. Poems for Doctors is an online project that uses poetry to offer opportunities for doctors to recognise aspects of their own experiences in those of others.

In the first phase of the Poems for Doctors collaboration, it was decided to make short films in which medical professionals or students choose one poem for particular reasons or associations that they explain, and give a reading. A blog, Facebook group, and Twitter were used to publish short seasons of these readings.



*Medical Lecturer Veronica O'Carroll reading  
The Bird that was Trapped has Flown by James Robertson*



## THOUGHTS ON THE PROJECT

*The short poems in Tools of the Trade really benefit from being read aloud, and the format of readings by doctors young and old, as well as medical students, is very powerful and moving.*

Prof John Gillies OBE, retired GP and co-editor  
of *Tools of the Trade*

*This project builds innovatively and appropriately on the highly successful Tools of the Trade collections that all medical graduates in Scotland have received since 2014, and further widens access to the arts for those connected to Health Care.*

Dr Martin MacIntyre, GP and poet.

*A wonderful extension and running mate for the Tools of the Trade: Poems for new doctors anthology. As a project in its own right though, and through Steve's skills, commitment, and acumen, it has offered so much more: the poetry films in particular, with readings from poets, doctors, and academics has been inspired and a truly interactive format to bring the book alive.*

Sam Tongue, Project Coordinator, Scottish Poetry Library



Medical student Joanne Igoli reading  
*Lines for a Bookmark* by Gael Turnbull



## THOUGHTS ON THE PROJECT

*Love it. Find it therapeutic when processing my own patient care experiences as a nurse and then nurse practitioner. When I worked in the ED I learned a couple of memorable, descriptive 2 minute poems as "verbal ativan" which often helped distract patients in full mania or having acute psychotic symptoms or acute "runaway" anxiety panic. Amazing how connecting with them through poetry would sometimes interrupt the cycling and offer an opportunity to de-escalate so we didn't have to overshoot with the "calming" medication followed by hours to sleep it off. Thank you for taking the time to do this for us all : )*

Melissa Alm-Parana, Nurse practitioner

*I love your website. I am very interested in connections between poetry and medicine and very much value your posts and also sharing ideas with other members of this group.*

Carole Bromely, Poet and educator



Medical student Armin Nazari reading  
Gift by Czesław Miłosz



## THOUGHTS ON THE PROJECT

*The aims of "Tools of the Trade" are to provide support for new doctors and to stimulate creativity. "Poems for Doctors" has taken both of these a step farther. Hearing and seeing someone read a poem makes it even more meaningful and powerful, especially if the reader is someone professionally connected to you.*

*As one of the editors of "Tools", I've read the poems in the three editions of our wee book many times. Listening to them being read affects me in a new and deeper way. The poems become more accessible and their relevance to health care clearer. Some have made me cry.*

**Dr Lesley Morrison, retired GP, co-editor *Tools of the Trade***

*I have been very moved by the readings. As a non-medic, it's given me glimpses into the situations clinical staff navigate every day. The openness of reflection from people at different stages of medical careers, and their willingness to share experience with colleagues and students, is pretty inspiring, and genuinely moving. If I do need to walk into a consulting room one day and put my life in somebody's hands, I'll feel lucky if that doctor has studied with any of these people.*

**Lilias Fraser, co-editor *Tools of the Trade* editions 1+2**



**Consultant Prof Rona Patey reading  
*The Precious 10 Minutes* by Hamish Whyte**



## Summary of outputs

29 poetry films produced and published

website and blog

Facebook group (600+ members)

development of video kiosk

development of interactive poetry jukebox

online poetry competition / award and reading at StAnza

exhibited (kiosk) at StAnza International Poetry Festival

exhibited (kiosk) at Scottish Medical Humanities, St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh

exhibited (poster) at Royal College of GPs Annual Primary Care Conference, SEC Centre, Glasgow

exhibited (kiosk) at Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC)

National Conference, 'Speakers Marketplace', Edinburgh

exhibited (jukebox) at Scottish Poetry Library, Edinburgh

exhibited (jukebox) at School of Medicine, St Andrews

various print materials (leaflets etc)



*Consultant Prof Alan Dennison reading  
from Ultrasound by Kathleen Jamie*





Photographs: Sean Earnshaw





## PREFLIGHT – May/June 2017



Meetings between Julie Struthers, Lili Fraser, and Steve Smart to define initial form of the online project - an online collection of video readings by clinicians and medical students. To be delivered via Vimeo, a blog, a Facebook group, and Twitter.

First readings filmed at School of Medicine, University of St Andrews

Post production

Blog set up

Facebook group guidelines, and group set up

Martin MacIntyre filmed in Edinburgh

Post production

Lesley Morrison joins project team.



GP and poet Dr Martin MacIntyre reading his own poem *Tools of the Trade*





## Season 1 Autumn/Winter 2017/18

7 poetry reading films published

See appendix for details of readers and readings

Video Kiosk #1 developed

Article in Wall Street Journal (print + online) 27/2/2018

March 2018 video kiosk exhibited at StAnza International Poetry Festival



*Clinical Teaching Fellow Dr Robert Humphries  
reading These are the Hands by Michael Rosen*



## Season 2 Summer 2018 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF NHS

8 poetry reading films published

See appendix for details of readers and readings

Ourania Varsou joins project team in St Andrews

June 2018 Video Kiosk at Scottish Medical Humanities event in Edinburgh



Instagram account set up

July 2018 photography of graduating medical students at St Andrews receiving 'Tools of the Trade'

John Zajicek takes over as St Andrews academic contact



Sam Tongue takes over for Scottish Poetry Library

October 2018 Poster at Royal College of GPs Annual Primary Care Conference, Glasgow (attended by Lesley Morrison)

October 2018 Poems for Doctors online poetry competition launched



*Patient and poet Nuala Watt reading  
her own poem The Eye Chart*



## Season 3 Winter/Spring 2018/19

7 poetry reading films published.

See appendix for details of readers and readings.

March 2019 Poems for Doctors online poetry competition  
– winner announced at StAnza International poetry  
competition

May 2019 Video Kiosk #2 installed at Scottish poetry Library  
in Edinburgh



Medical student Rumaisa Zubairi  
on StAnza main stage reading her  
competition winning poem.

*Flexor Digitorum* was later published in  
the NHS anthology *These are the Hands*.



Junior Hospital Physician Dr Chris Lowe reading  
*A brief format to be use when consulting with patients*  
by Glenn Colquhoun





## Season 4 Summer 2019



April 2019 - Exhibited at Association of Speakers Clubs (ASC) National Conference, Speakers Marketplace Edinburgh

7 Readings featuring clinical staff from locations across Scotland published

See appendix for details of readers and readings

June 2019 Video Kiosk #2 exhibited at Royal Society of Edinburgh



October/November 2019 - Development of Video jukebox software and interactive video kiosk (#3)

Video Kiosk #3 (poetry jukebox) deployed at SPL in Edinburgh and MBSB at St Andrews with playlist of 28 poetry films.

December 2019 – Winning poem from Poems for Doctors online competition (Flexor Digitorum by Rumaisa Zubairi) published in new NHS anthology reflecting experiences of NHS staff These are the Hands

Facebook group – 600+ members



*Medical Demonstrator Dr Linda Proven reading  
On Hearing for the first time by Carole Bromley*



## What next?

At the time of writing this report (March 2020) during discussions between myself and Sam Tongue at Scottish Poetry Library, and John Zajicek at the School of Medicine in St Andrews we have agreed that the initial 'filmed readings' phase of the project is at a point where we now feel this should pause.

This is likely to coincide with a number of staff changes at St Andrews. Dr Kathryn Steven is now acting academic liaison for the project. Steve Smart will be leaving his formal role in the project, although he is keen to continue in a voluntary capacity. This point marks the end of the School of Medicine's Learning Technology (LT) Team's formal involvement with the Poems for Doctors online project. Sam Tongue continues as project liaison for Scottish Poetry Library.

At the time of writing a number of ideas have been mooted, amongst these are: a new poetry competition for NHS authors, and ideas to seek out medics stories about occasions when 'poetry mattered' to them. Recently we have offered films for use by SPL has as part of an online project to support NHS staff during the coronavirus pandemic.



*GP Dr Jennifer Kennedy reading  
The Unprofessionals by U. A. Fanthorpe*



## Acknowledgements

It has been a pleasure and a genuine privilege to meet all of the readers who have participated in this project. I am deeply grateful for their time, patience, good humour, and generosity of spirit. Thank you.

In addition I would like to acknowledge the help and support of other professionals who have been essential supporters of this collaboration. In particular David Crossman, Julie Struthers, Lillas Fraser, Leslie Morrison, Ourania Varsou, John Zajicek, Aly Barr and Sam Tongue - for providing help and support, but also for simply giving me space when I needed it.

Thanks to poets Martin MacIntyre, Andy Jackson, and Clare Crossman for judging our first poetry competition, and to StAnza Poetry Festival Director Eleanor Livingstone, for offering a centre-stage spot for our award ceremony, and for her continuing support of the *Poems for Doctors* project.

Thanks to Martin MacIntyre also for his help with Gaelic/English translation.

*Steve Smart, April 2020*



*Consultant Prof John Zajicek reading  
Multiple Sclerosis by Cynthia Huntington*





Photographs: Steve Smart





## APPENDIX - POETRY FILMS

Films featured clinicians or medical students, briefly introducing their role at the time of filming, and saying a little about why they had chosen the poem, before reading the poem. Readings were captioned, some Gaelic readings were included.

### Season 1 Autumn/Winter 2017/18

#### reader

#### poem

Dr Martin MacIntyre, GP and poet

*Tools of the Trade* by Martin MacIntyre

Iuliana Kanya, Medical Demonstrator

*A Medical Education* by Glenn Colquhoun

Dr Robert Humphries, Clinical Teaching Fellow

*These are the Hands* by Michael Rosen

Dr Chris Lowe, Junior Hospital Physician

*A brief format to be use when consulting with patients* by Glenn Colquhoun

Julie Struthers, Deputy Head of the University of St Andrews School of Medicine

*Nothing* by Selima Hill

Dr Winnie Dhaliwal, Lecturer in Infectious Diseases

*Poem for a Hospital Wall* by Diana Hendry

Prof David Crossman, Dean of Medicine, University of St Andrews

*Second Opinion* by Douglas Dunn



Lecturer in infectious diseases, Dr Whinnie Dhaliwal reading  
*Poem for a hospital wall* by Diana Hendry





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### Season 2 Summer 2018 – coinciding with the 70th Anniversary of the NHS

reader	poem
Dr Linda Proven, Medical Demonstrator	<i>On Hearing for the First Time</i> by Carole Bromley
Veronica O'Carroll, Medical Lecturer	<i>The Bird that was Trapped has Flown</i> by James Robertson
Wojciech Cymes, Medical Demonstrator	<i>From the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh</i> by Andrew Greig
Prof John Zajicek, Consultant	<i>Multiple Sclerosis</i> by Cynthia Huntington
Eilish Hannah, Medical Demonstrator	<i>At Eighty</i> by Edwin Morgan
Gillian Strugnell, Medical Lecturer	<i>Recovery Room</i> by Patricia Beer
Nicola Hall, Medical Student	<i>Ecclesiastes 3, i-viii</i>
Dr Chris Lowe, Medical Demonstrator	<i>Night Sister</i> by Elizabeth Jennings



Medical student Nicola Hall reading  
*Ecclesiastes 3, i-viii*



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Films featured clinicians or medical students, briefly introducing their role at the time of filming, and saying a little about why they had chosen the poem, before reading the poem. Readings were captioned, some Gaelic readings were included.

### Season 3 Winter/Spring 2018/19

#### reader

Ed Griffiths, Medical Student

Dr Imogen Murray, Junior Doctor

Dr Martin MacIntyre, GP and poet

Joanne Igoli, Medical Student

Rupert Clark, Medical Student

Armin Nazari, Medical Student

Callum George, Medical Student

#### poem

*The Door* by Miroslav Holub

*The Guest House* by Jalaluddin Rumi

*An Suaimhneas Bruaillein (In the Tranquillity of Delirium)* by Martin MacIntyre

*Lines for a Bookmark* by Gael Turnbull

*Things* by Fleur Adcock

*Gift* by Czesław Miłosz

*Beannacht / Blessing* by John O'Donohue



*Junior Doctor Dr Imogen Murray reading  
The Guest House by Jalaluddin Rumi*



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Films featured clinicians or medical students, briefly introducing their role at the time of filming, and saying a little about why they had chosen the poem, before reading the poem. Readings were captioned, some Gaelic readings were included.

### Season 4 Summer 2019

#### reader

#### poem

Dr Nuala Watt (Glasgow), patient and poet	<i>The Eye Chart</i> by Nuala Watt
Dr Lynn Urquhart, Consultant, Ninewells Hospital, Dundee	<i>Talking to the Family</i> by John Stone
Prof Rona Patey, Consultant, University of Aberdeen	<i>The Precious 10 Minutes</i> by Hamish Whyte
Dr Ourania Varsou, Anatomy Lecturer, University of Glasgow	<i>The First Death</i> by Andrea Wershof Schwartz
Prof Alan Dennison, Consultant, University of Aberdeen	<i>from Ultrasound</i> by Kathleen Jamie
Prof John Gillies, Retired GP, University of Edinburgh	<i>From Cumha Chaluim Iain MhicGil-Eain</i> by Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean)
Dr Jennifer Kennedy, GP, University of Dundee	<i>The Unprofessionals</i> by U. A. Fanthorpe



Retired GP Prof John Gillies reading  
*From Cumha Chaluim Iain MhicGil-Eain* by  
Somhairle MacGill-Eain (Sorley MacLean)



## APPENDIX - URLS/CONTACT

### resource

Poems for Doctors blog and website

Poems for Doctors Facebook group

Poems for Doctors contact email

Steve Smart contact email

Sam Tongue contact email

### address

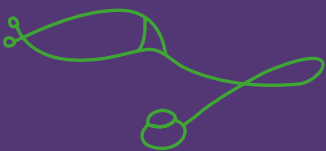
[med.st-andrews.ac.uk/poemsfordoctors](http://med.st-andrews.ac.uk/poemsfordoctors)

[facebook.com/groups/poemsfordoctors/](https://facebook.com/groups/poemsfordoctors/)

[poemsfordoctors@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:poemsfordoctors@st-andrews.ac.uk)

[duntruner@gmail.com](mailto:duntruner@gmail.com)

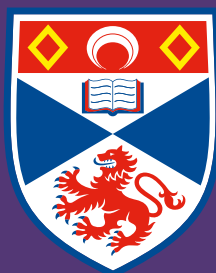
[samuel.tongue@spl.org.uk](mailto:samuel.tongue@spl.org.uk)



*Anatomy lecturer Dr Ourania Varsou reading  
The First Death by Andrea Wershof Schwartz*



# Scottish Poetry Library



University of  
St Andrews



[med.st-andrews.ac.uk/poemsfordoctors](http://med.st-andrews.ac.uk/poemsfordoctors)