

U.Va. Med School, Drama Department To Showcase Inspiring Play About Medical Malpractice



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Medical errors and their effects on both patients and physicians will be the focus of a collaboration Wednesday between the University of Virginia [School of Medicine](#) and the [Department of Drama](#) in the [College of Arts & Sciences](#).

Graduate and undergraduate drama students and faculty will perform a full reading of “Love Alone,” an award-winning and critically acclaimed play by Deborah Salem Smith, on Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. at the Helms Theatre. Earlier in the day, Smith will join actors and a faculty member at the weekly [Medical Center Hour](#) to discuss the issues presented in the play.

Directed by [Colleen Kelly](#), associate professor and head of the M.F.A. acting program, the reading – which will also feature drama faculty members [Judith Reagan](#), associate professor, and [Richard Warner](#), professor and head of acting – is a collaborative effort with the Medical School Hour and its host, [Marcia Day Childress](#), associate professor of medical education at the [Center for Biomedical Ethics and Humanities](#) in the U.Va. School of Medicine.

“We are so grateful that the U.Va. Drama Department has organized this public staged reading of the full play, giving us all a chance to experience this extraordinary piece of theater about an incident of malpractice and forgiveness in the wake of medical error,” Childress said.

Both programs are free and open to the public. Free parking will be available for the evening program in the [Culbreth Road parking garage](#).

Smith, playwright-in-residence at Trinity Repertory Company, a renowned nonprofit regional theater located in Providence, R.I., writes about what she calls the “grayest of the gray zones,” where there is no single truth, but many truths. Her subjects are the social issues for which there are no easy solutions.

An established playwright, Smith moved to Providence because her partner was doing her residency in psychiatry at Brown University – an endeavor that inspired Smith to write “Love

Alone,” which premiered at Trinity in March. Smith saw the incredible pressure her partner and fellow doctors were under to avoid medical mistakes, despite the fact that daily medical decisions often depend on intuition.

In “Love Alone,” Smith explores medical malpractice, gay marriage and family rights. The play is about a routine medical procedure that goes tragically wrong, an ensuing lawsuit and how the lives of both the patient’s family and the doctor charged with her care are transformed.

A New York Times review heralded “Love Alone” as a “lucid, deeply nuanced and fearless work that pulls no punches as it lays bare the emotions of two families.” The drama has also been the recipient of the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award and the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award.

The play details the hard realities facing a woman whose lesbian partner dies during routine surgery – moving back and forth across the legal, medical and social landscapes. Smith’s play is drawn from interviews and conversations, mostly with doctors, but also nurses, lawyers and risk managers.

Like the couple in the play, Smith and her partner have been together for a long time. “Love Alone” is the story of two women, deeply in love, and the unexpected death of one of them in minor surgery.

“There’s much to be learned from this gripping and emotionally entangling drama as it works through how a fatal medical error affects not only the patient’s family, but also the responsible doctor and her family,” Childress said.

In addition to the dramatic reading, this week’s Medical Center Hour lecture, scheduled for Wednesday from 12:20 to 1:30 p.m. in the **Jordan Conference Center Auditorium**, will be “A Playwright Takes on Medical Malpractice *and* Forgiveness.”

The presentation will include talks by Smith, actors from the Department of Drama and **Margaret Plews-Ogan**, head of the division of general medicine, geriatrics and palliative care. Plews-Ogan has written extensively on how physicians deal with their medical errors.

For more than a dozen years, the Medical Center Hour has hosted the Medical School’s annual Richardson Memorial Lecture that focuses on medical mistakes, including how to prevent errors, communicate about errors, attend to and learn from patients and families, and improve patient safety.

“The School of Medicine series addresses issues of mutual interest to medicine and society, and medical error has certainly been a high-profile concern in recent years for both the public as well as health care professionals and organizations,” Childress said.

Produced by the Center for Biomedical Ethics and Humanities in partnership with Historical Collections of the **Claude Moore Health Sciences Library**, the Medical Center Hour is the

Medical School's weekly forum on medicine and society. It is held Wednesdays from mid-September through March from 12:20 to 1:30 p.m. in the Jordan Hall Conference Center Auditorium.

All programs are free and open to the university and the public. Videos of each forum are posted one week after the live presentation. The spring 2013 schedule can be found [here](#).

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