



# Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine

*Associate Professor Judy Z. Segal*

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## Assessing rhetorical principles of contemporary health issues

Hypochondriacs are vulnerable to media hype, anorexics are susceptible to public scrutiny, and migraine sufferers are tainted with the history of the “migraine personality,” maintains rhetorical theorist Judy Z. Segal. All are influenced by the power of persuasion.

*Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine* explores persistent health conditions that resist conventional medical solutions. Using a range of rhetorical principles, Segal analyzes how patients and their illnesses are formed within the physician/patient relationship. The intractable problem of a patient’s rejection of a doctor’s advice, says Segal, can be considered a rhetorical failure—a failure of persuasion.

Examining the discourse of medicine through case studies, applications, and analyses, Segal illustrates how illnesses are described in ways that limit

patients’ choices and satisfaction. She also illuminates psychiatric conditions, infectious diseases, genetic testing, and cosmetic surgeries through the lens of rhetorical theory.

*Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine* bridges critical analysis for scholarly, professional, and lay audiences. Segal highlights the persuasive element in diagnosis, health policy, illness experience, and illness narratives. She also addresses questions of direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs, the role of health information in creating the “worried well” and problems of trust and expertise in physician/patient relationships. A useful resource for critical common sense in everyday life, the text provides an effective examination of a society increasingly influenced by the rhetoric of health and medicine.

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