



**Creating Space IX: April 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Hamilton, ON**  
**Theme: Cultural Humility and Contemporary Medical Practice –**  
**(How) Can the Humanities Help?**

**Abstract Submission Form**

**Title:**

**Enmeshed in Metaphor: The Scientific, Philosophical, and Satirical Essays of Samuel Vaisrub, MD**

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**Body of Text: (Maximum 300 words)**

The “triple threat” physician—inspiring teacher, skilled clinician, and prolific author—has long been in decline. But the renaissance of physician-essayists such as Atul Gawande, Abraham Verghese, and Jerome Groopman suggests that there is both interest and value in learning from literary physicians. Another medical literary exemplar is Samuel Vaisrub, MD (1906-1980), who wrote over 250 witty and often provocative essays as editor of the *Manitoba Medical Review* and as senior editor of *JAMA*.

Vaisrub attributed his talent for editorial writing to his peripatetic reading—from the *Talmud* to *TIME* and from Plato to *Playboy*. Although English was his third language after Russian and Yiddish, his editorials are rich in mythological, historical, and religious metaphors and also reflect the eternal values, ethical imperatives, and guiding principles of the Bible.

Vaisrub disliked authors who suppress humour and editors who delete it. His own light (and sometimes bawdy) touch is everywhere in his writing. As a linguistic conscience of sorts, he objected to clumsy grammar and the use of jargon but chose to thank “those authors whose flawless prose gives the overworked editorial digits a

well-deserved rest.”

Believing that medicine was ever “precariously balanced on the edge of uncertainty,” he reminded the physician-reader of the necessity of making decisions based on clinical judgment rather than primarily on endless sophisticated tests. Sensing technology was being substituted for compassion and testing for talk, he wondered whether the patient would have to be the compassionate one! And he chidingly suggested that genetic engineering could never be entirely successful until “sociobiologists assign a locus on the DNA strand to compassion and respect for life’s sanctity.” Vaisrub constantly reminded us that the physician is an equal member of society: a friend, a co-religionist, an advisor, and above all a human being—but never a super-god.

**Keywords: (maximum of 3)**

Samuel Vaisrub, physician essayist, medical metaphors

**Citations: (optional)**

1. Vaisrub S: *Medicine’s Metaphors: Messages & Menaces*. Oradell, New Jersey: Medical Economics Books, 1977.
2. Blum A: Remembering Sam Vaisrub. *CHEST* 1982;81:134-135.
3. Blum A: Samuel Vaisrub, MD: clinician, editor, “amateur.” *Arch Intern Med*. 1982;142:449-450.
4. Blum A: Vaisrub: good language with a light touch. *CMAJ* 1982;127:307-308.

**Type of presentation preferred:**

**Research paper**

**Novel humanities educational experiences**

**Panel presentation**

**Workshop**

**Pecha Kucha**

**Performance**

**Poster presentation**

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**Deadline for submission: Midnight (EST) January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**