

Institute of Human Sciences
School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography
51/53 Banbury Road
Oxford
OX1 6PE



Zoe Rhoades
zoe.rhoades@sic.ox.ac.uk

DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Dissertation Title: Living with Multiple Myeloma: The Cultural and Genetic 'Self'

Multiple myeloma is a rare bone marrow cancer that often affects multiple areas of the body through the movement of blood cells around the body. My research questions will be focused on diagnosis, treatment and the social and physical impacts on individuals living with multiple myeloma (please request supplementary documents for the preliminary scope of questions for my semi-structured online interviews). Alongside my primary data from interviews, I will be researching the biological and genetic characteristics of multiple myeloma. I also hope to speak to doctors and nurses who treat multiple myeloma patients to learn more about the biological aspects as well as the social and cultural struggles and achievements experienced by individuals living with it.

This dissertation sits within the subfield of medical anthropology, a particularly interesting field of research in modern society as it moves away from looking only at the physiological health of individuals with medical difficulties, but also explores their health within social and cultural contexts. An anthropological perspective in medical research provides a more holistic view of medical concerns, enabling scientists and doctors and individuals to take a holistic approach to treatment and recovery, and in extreme cases, integration back into society.

Multiple myeloma is a particularly interesting cancer to research in relation to maintaining a positive mindset and its social impacts as patients must constantly monitor it. The nature of the disease means that patients must constantly try new treatments, and once they find one that works the cancer eventually finds a way around it, and they are back to square one. This game of 'whack-a-mole' means that individuals living with multiple myeloma must constantly search for new treatments to follow the moving cancer, meaning it is currently incurable and unpredictable.

The research will be carried out through online semi-structured interviews using Microsoft Teams, or the medium most convenient for them. Individuals will be prompted to talk about the background of their diagnosis and living with multiple myeloma, treatments, personal impacts, and maintaining a positive mindset.

The results will be used in the study by quoting participants and using their individual stories to ethnographically analyse some of the ways in which patients with multiple myeloma 'cultivate' positivity. However, all data from interviews will be anonymous. This analysis will form a large part of my dissertation for the BA in Human Sciences. In order to use this information in my dissertation I will follow professional guidelines by seeking informed consent from the participants before interviewing them (please request supplementary documents for my information sheet and letter of consent to be signed by all participants).