

## **“How is Your Stomach?”- Sharing Stories as a Form of Science Communication**

Dr Will Rifkin, Program Director, Science Communication, Faculty of Science, University of New South Wales, [willrifkin@unsw.edu.au](mailto:willrifkin@unsw.edu.au)

Dr Alan Morris, Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, [a.morris@unsw.edu.au](mailto:a.morris@unsw.edu.au)

Briony Pavel, Jessica Bell, Vi Nguyen, Dominic Leung, Sei Nishimura, and Linda Ong, Science students, Faculty of Science, UNSW, Email: (c/- will rifkin)

Dr Ho Thi Hien, Research fellow, Faculty of Medicine, UNSW, Email: (c/- will rifkin)

### **Abstract**

Can stories build mutual understanding between ‘experts’ and the people who consult them? We have undertaken a project to test stories but not as a way to improve clarity or technical understanding. Rather, they would build each side’s view of the personal impact of the problems they share - one as client/sufferer, the other as specialist.

In our test, we are gathering lay person’s accounts of their stomach and digestive problems, much as Studs Terkel gathered stories about people’s jobs for his classic, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about It*. In our thirty interviews to date, we have heard how people have come to terms with their stomach problems, the impact on their social lives and families, and how they feel they are treated by doctors.

The research team of undergraduate science and science communication students will also collect stories from medical practitioners. The stories will concern experiences of interacting with patients who have stomach problems, from conveying an indefinite diagnosis to dealing with a lack of compliance with a treatment regime.

The conference session will be an experience in storytelling about our stomachs, observation of how it feels to have a receptive audience for such a story, and reflection on the impact of these stories on one another, on our families and friends, and on medical practitioners. Participants will also draw implications of this storytelling approach for other types of science communication, particularly forms that involve reaching a mass, public audience.

### **Paper**

[The session will be interactive instead of being a straight presentation. A draft paper currently in preparation may be circulated at the conference. Conference attendees interested in publications can contact the first author, and papers will be sent when they are ready.]