The (Re)Sexualization of the Medical

This talk reverses the key terms of the conference theme, seeking to examine how sexuality is (re)claimed after medicalization. I am interested, in the first instance, in sex-associated disease—for example, cancers of the breast, uterus, cervix, ovaries, prostate, testicles—and not only in the particular case, but in terms of public discourse. In one line of inquiry, I consider what can be learned from a close look at the currently-running Showtime series, The Big C. The show's main character is diagnosed with metastatic melanoma (terminal). Post-diagnosis, she seems to be discovering, among other things, her sexuality, and I can't help noticing that the series’ creators chose a non-sex-associated cancer as her affliction—when breast cancer might have been the default choice (see, for example, Sex and the City). Cathy’s skin cancer is a stigmata on her back—but her front is beautiful, and, in one episode, she gazes at its reflection admiringly in her stainless-steel refrigerator. My paper asks, is the medicalization of sex a one-way street?

Biography
Judy Segal teaches rhetorical history and theory and rhetoric of health and medicine. In particular, she turns to rhetorical theory and criticism for approaches to questions concerning, for example, patient nonadherence to physicians’ advice; trust in medical experts; end-of-life decision making; illness anxiety; contested illnesses; and the relations of pharmaceuticals and diagnostic categories. Her monograph, Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine (Southern Illinois UP) appeared in 2005. Her recent essays appear in journals such as Journal of Medical Humanities and health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness, and Medicine, and in these books: Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma (V. Raoul et al, eds., 2007) and Rhetoric of Healthcare: Essays toward a New Disciplinary Inquiry (B. Heifferon and S. Brown, eds, 2007).

Her current research project is entitled, "Values and Public Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Direct-to-Consumer Advertising for Prescription Pharmaceuticals." She was, from 2003 to 2007, a member of the President's International Advisory Committee for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and, in 2007, Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies.