



Jacqueline Healy

Pestilence and Plague: From the Spanish flu to COVID-19

This paper examines the development of the exhibition *Pestilence and Plague: From the Spanish flu to COVID-19* that will be held at the Medical History Museum in 2026 coinciding with the 150th Anniversary of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne. It studies the power of objects in the making of the history of medicine in the context of bringing together past, present and future views in relation to pandemics. Exploring the nature of material collected in different eras such as documents, art, multi-media, objects and equipment. Pivotal to the history of pandemics in Victoria is the contribution of the University of Melbourne in development of treatment, research, public education and advocacy. This exhibition through the collection will explore the roles of key individuals, public education campaigns and cutting-edge research and community responses. During the COVID-19 pandemic the Medical History Museum started collecting for the COVID-19 collection. This collection ranges from items made by students to the Dean's videos delivered through this period. This complements material already in the collection as part of the Australian Medical Association Collection from the Spanish flu pandemic in Victoria in 1919 such as newspaper reports, a beautifully hand-crafted cotton facemask and a photograph of a group of doctors and nurses pictured in front of an ambulance in Ballarat in 1919 fully masked. There is an article from the Ballarat Courier outlining protocols that could have been published in *The Age* in 2020. Collection material links the past, present and future and the complex journey of continuity and change. Importantly, the way these items are utilised accentuate the significance of medical history collections. They

illustrate an intense and terrifying experience for the community and a challenging and complex time for the medical and allied professions.