



A NOVEL CONCEPT

Books by Heart brings the humanities to healthcare innovation

As the Books by Heart app launched its beta test on campus, cardiologist Dr. Gabrielle Horne sat down with philosopher and Director of FYP Dr. Daniel Brandes to discuss the transformative potential of book culture on hospital wards

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CAN BOOKS SAVE LIVES?

An ambitious experiential learning project aims to address this question head-on. Books by Heart (BBH) is a collaboration between the University of King's College, Nova Scotia Health and the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association. The goal is to provide free local literature to acute care wards in hospitals by way of a smartphone app stocked with ebooks and audiobooks. By making the app freely available to the patients, healthcare staff, doctors and nurses on these wards, they hope to foster a “book culture” and create opportunities for connection and dialogue among those spending time there.

Where does King's come in? The first step of this innovative project is a beta testing phase for the Books by Heart app. It launched on campus in the fall of 2022, giving students, faculty, staff and alumni access to the app and its reading material.

On a late-November evening in the KTS Lecture Hall, **Joanna Sheridan, BA(Hons)'07**, introduced the study. As the university's Coordinator of Experiential Learning, Sheridan leads the project on

campus along with the student team of seven overseeing the test phase. Sheridan said Books by Heart is suited to the kind of education King's offers. “A liberal arts education is a broad enabling force behind an individual, and so King's work-integrated learning initiatives are deliberately border-crossing.

“Books by Heart is emblematic of that spirit,” she continued. “Health innovation and healthcare research employ many people beyond medical personnel. By partnering on a large project like this, we carve out a space for our students to build work experience, professional networks and context in a non-traditional field for arts graduates.”

Co-presidents of the Books by Heart student team, fifth-year student Bronwyn Turnquist and third-year Laura Gilron introduced the key speakers for the evening: cardiologist **Gabrielle Horne, MFA'19**, and Director of the Foundation Year Program **Dr. Daniel Brandes, '90**. Horne has been instrumental in the development of the project and spoke from her perspective as a health care provider, while Brandes addressed the philosophical power of reading. Each wrestled with the

bigger questions surrounding the project. Namely: how much can a shared experience of a book really help?

Central to the project's philosophy is the idea that books help us grapple with difficult situations. One school of thought argues that books help people come to terms with their mortality, exploring the “big” questions about life and its inevitable end. The other frames reading as a way to escape real-world troubles, however briefly.

Brandes pointed to Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in which the titular character, upper-class Ivan Ilyich, grapples with a terminal illness. Ultimately, the novella explores the importance of human touch and connection at a crucial point in one's life.

“I find that book very effective for raising the kinds of issues we're interested in,” Brandes said. “It's about distinguishing between intimate care—which a human being has a right to—and the more detached, technical care that a person often expects from hospitals.”

Brandes and Horne both believe the app will allow more opportunities for doctors to connect with their patients on a personal level, deepening the level of care at a time and place when it's needed most.

For those who read for escapism, the app's selection of books is deliberately broad, comprising mystery, romance, Indigenous literature, history and memoir, to name a few genres.

Asked why the titles represent all local authors, Horne explained, “We thought about who our patients are. [They're] mostly people who have grown up in the Maritime provinces, which is largely a rural area. We wanted to be able to bring books to our patients that they could relate to. We also wanted to support our local book industry.”

Books by Heart is available to students, staff, faculty and alumni for the remainder of the academic year. Visit booksbyheartkings.ca to learn more and set up your account.



Download the Glassboxx app and the collection for Books by Heart at King's for FREE by visiting glassboxx.com/token and entering the voucher code BBHk92N5alu

If you need any help getting started, email bbh.ukc@gmail.com and a King's intern will be happy to assist you!

