

Abraham Verghese will receive National Humanities medal from President Obama in a White House ceremony

Stanford University announced on September 14 that Abraham Verghese will be honored at a September 22 White House ceremony for helping to deepen the nation's understanding of the human experience. (This story is reprinted from the Stanford University website.)

Abraham Verghese, MD, professor of medicine at the [Stanford School of Medicine](#), will be awarded a [National Humanities Medal](#), the White House announced today.

President Barack Obama will confer the medal at a White House ceremony Sept. 22. The ceremony [will be live-streamed](#).



“Abraham Verghese is not only an exemplary clinician, he is an exemplary humanist,” said Stanford President [Marc Tessier-Lavigne](#).

“Every day in the classroom, he teaches his students that professions such as medicine benefit from an understanding of the human condition. We are so proud that his breadth of scholarship has been recognized with this honor.”

Inaugurated in 1997, the National Humanities Medal “honors individuals or groups whose work has deepened the nation’s understanding of the human experience, broadened citizens’ engagement with history, literature, languages, philosophy, and other humanities subjects,” according to the National Endowment for the Humanities website. As many as 12 medals are awarded each year.

The organization said Verghese is receiving the medal “for reminding us that the patient is the center of the medical enterprise. His range of proficiency embodies the diversity of the humanities; from his efforts to emphasize empathy in medicine, to his imaginative renderings of the human drama.”

“I am humbled and excited by this honor,” said Verghese, who is the Linda R. Meier and Joan F. Lane Provostial Professor. “The names of previous recipients include writers I most admire. It’s a wonderful affirmation of a path that in the early years I wasn’t sure was the right path, even though it was one I felt compelled to follow.”

The Human Touch

Verghese is a critically acclaimed, best-selling author and a physician with an international reputation for his emphasis on empathy for patients in an era in which technology often overwhelms the human side of medicine.



“This is a special honor for a physician,” said [Lloyd Minor, MD](#), dean of the School of Medicine. “Through his writings and his work as a physician, Abraham has

worked to battle what he has seen as a lack of humanism in modern medicine. The courage to follow his own path and the compassion he has brought to his work, have made the world a better place.”

In his first book, *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*, Verghese focused on his early years as an orderly, his caring for terminal AIDS patients and the insights he gained from the relationships he formed and the suffering he witnessed.

“I felt strongly then and now that what I was writing about, and my interest in the human experience of being ill or caring for the ill, was as much a part of medicine as knowledge of the function of the pancreas, for example,” said Verghese, who is also a vice chair of [Stanford's Department of Medicine](#). In addition, Verghese directs the Stanford interdisciplinary center, [Presence](#), which reflects these interests.

The [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) manages the nomination process for the National Humanities Medal on behalf of the White House. Each year, the NEH invites nominations from individuals and organizations across the country. The National Council on the Humanities, NEH's presidentially-appointed and Senate-confirmed advisory body, reviews the nominations and provides recommendations to the president, who selects the recipients.

Joining Vergheze as medal recipients this year are two other writers with Stanford connections: poet [Louise Glück](#), a visiting faculty member in the Department of English; and [Elaine Pagels](#), a religious historian and author of the *Gnostic Gospels* and *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, who earned both a bachelor's and a master's degrees from Stanford.