

## Brief Report

### Learning about public health via novels: Ebooks and print formats

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We previously identified and assembled a collection of novels in ebook format that had public health themes,<sup>1</sup> which could potentially be used in medical education (full report at: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/wellington/otago022528.doc>). Subsequently, we made 10 of those novels available at our medical school library on a hand-held device (Kobo eReader, Table 1). In addition, another 10 novels in paperback format were also made available (n=5 novels shared both formats, Table 2). The availability of these novels was regularly promoted by the library service to the fourth and fifth year medical students during the 2011 academic year (there were 87 and 90 of these students respectively).

The results of this promotional intervention have been submitted to a journal. We will also contrast the results with our research on medical student interest in borrowing public health related movies out of this same library.<sup>2 3</sup>

Table 1: Ten novels containing public health themes that have been made available in ebook format (Kobo eReader, available at the Wellington Medical and Health Sciences Library)

Title (author)	Public -ation year	Comment on relevance to public health
"Solar" (Ian McEwan)	2010	Climate change is a large part of the background of this novel with the main character being a scientist. Given the current and future relationship between climate change and health we considered inclusion in this list was well justified. It is also a well written novel. See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_(novel)</a> .
"Gain" (Richard Powers)	1998	This novel intertwines two stories, one is about the history of a chemical corporation and the other about a woman who develops ovarian cancer. Issues covered include environmental pollution and its health impacts and legal action against powerful corporations. This book won a best historical fiction prize. See also: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gain_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gain_(novel)</a> .
"The Runaway Jury" (John Grisham)	1996	A legal thriller about a jury case involving a tobacco company and a cigarette-related death (see: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Runaway_Jury">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Runaway_Jury</a> ). A movie with this title was made but it centred around a lawsuit against a large scale retailer of small arms. Also available in hard copy format from the medical school library.

Title (author)	Public -ation year	Comment on relevance to public health
"Martin Arrowsmith" or "Arrowsmith" (Sinclair Lewis)	1925	Descriptions of scientific research, scientific fraud, medical ethics, and public health (of relevance to today). The hero is dedicated to the scientific method and intellectual honesty (see: the medical humanities literature <sup>4</sup> and <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrowsmith_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrowsmith_(novel)</a> . See also reference. <sup>5</sup> Also available in hard copy format from the medical school library.
"Of Human Bondage" (Somerset Maugham)	1915	A novel that includes powerful portrayals of poverty, homelessness, and prostitution – all of relevance to public health. There are also interesting aspects of medical training and insights into the high mortality rates in early 1900s England. Wikipedia states: "It is generally agreed to be his masterpiece and to be strongly autobiographical" ( <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Human_Bondage">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Human_Bondage</a> ). The public health and medical aspects are fairly sparse in first two thirds of the book – but are much stronger in the last third.
"The Jungle" (Upton Sinclair)	1906	Descriptions of the poverty and harsh working conditions of the working class in early 20 <sup>th</sup> century America. Also deals with the corruption and lack of food safety in the American meatpacking industry. The public outcry in response to this novel contributed to new laws and establishing an agency that would become the Food and Drug Administration in the United States (see <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jungle">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jungle</a> ). Also available in hard copy format from the medical school library.
"Middlemarch" (George Eliot)	1872	Descriptions of medical reform (planning a fever hospital and medical research), social action around housing, political reform, and social class. <sup>6</sup> According to Wikipedia it is listed in "The 10 Greatest Books of All Time", which is based on the ballots of 125 selected writers ( <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middlemarch">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middlemarch</a> ).
"North and South" (Elizabeth Gaskell)	1854	Descriptions of poor environmental conditions and hazardous occupations in the UK (dust-related lung disease and tuberculosis). Also poverty, crowding, social inequalities and the social and political responses to these. <sup>6</sup> See also: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_and_South_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_and_South_(novel)</a> .
"Mary Barton" (Elizabeth Gaskell)	1848	Although mainly around interpersonal dramas there are strong descriptions of urban poverty in industrial England. Refers to the health hazards for factory workers, high child mortality, prostitution and the polluted air in Manchester. See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Barton">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Barton</a> .
"A Journal of the Plague Year" (Daniel Defoe)	1722	Describes in great detail the impact and responses to the bubonic plague in London in 1665. There are many issues that are similar to responses to more modern pandemics (such as SARS and the A(H1N1) 2009 influenza pandemic). While there is some dated language it is still very readable. Also it is far more systematic and detailed than the accounts by Samuel Pepys in his diary. See also: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Journal_of_the_Plague_Year">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Journal_of_the_Plague_Year</a> and this is also available in hard copy format from the medical school library.

Table 2: Ten novels containing public health themes (available at the Wellington Medical and Health Sciences Library, ordered by publication date)

Title (author)	Public -ation year	Comment on relevance to public health
"Solar" (Ian McEwan)	2010	Climate change is a large part of the background of this novel with the main character being a scientist. Given the current and future relationship between climate change and health we considered inclusion in this list was well justified. It is also a well written novel. See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_(novel)</a> .
"The Constant Gardener" (John Le Carré)	2001	A thriller that involves an international conspiracy of corrupt bureaucracy and pharmaceutical money. There is also the exploitation of patients in the developing world (Africa). (See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Constant_Gardener">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Constant_Gardener</a> ). A movie of the book was also produced and is available from the medical school library (see also: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Constant_Gardener_(film)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Constant_Gardener_(film)</a> )
"The Cobra Event" (Richard Preston)	1998	A thriller about bioterrorist attacks in US cities with a genetically-engineered microbe and the public health and law enforcement response. It has high levels of realism and the key doctor involved works in epidemiology and pathology. (See also: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cobra_Event">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cobra_Event</a> ).
"The Runaway Jury" (John Grisham)	1996	A legal thriller about a jury case involving a tobacco company and a cigarette-related death (see: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Runaway_Jury">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Runaway_Jury</a> ). A movie with this title was made but it centred around a lawsuit against a large scale retailer of small arms.
"Civil Action" (Jonathan Harr)	1996	A true story about environmental pollution causing health problems in a town and the role of concerned citizens and legal action in trying to address it. It is described in Wikipedia as a "non-fiction novel". See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Civil_Action">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Civil_Action</a> . Also made into a movie with John Travolta (see: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Civil_Action_(film)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Civil_Action_(film)</a> ).
"The Citadel" (A. J. Cronin)	1937	A novel about how an idealistic young doctor gets "seduced" into being a society doctor and ends up working in a expensive clinic for money. However, he subsequently reverts back to his former idealistic ways. This novel apparently played some role in stimulating the National Health Service in the United Kingdom being started. For more see: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Citadel_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Citadel_(novel)</a>
"Down and out in Paris and London" (George Orwell)	1933	Well written descriptions of poverty and entrapment in poverty, malnourishment and unhygienic restaurants and living conditions. Also covers aspects of inequality, abuse of and prejudice against poor people, tobacco use, the limitations of "charity", and unjust laws that result in "tramps" continuously moving from place to place. There is even a "smallpox inspection" by a medical student who smokes. Is described as a "semi-autobiographical novel" in Wikipedia. See: <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_and_Out_in_Paris_and_London">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Down_and_Out_in_Paris_and_London</a> .
"Arrow-smith" (Sinclair Lewis)	1925	Descriptions of scientific research, scientific fraud, medical ethics, and public health (of relevance to today). The hero is dedicated to the scientific method and intellectual honesty (see: the medical humanities literature <sup>4</sup> and <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrowsmith_(novel)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrowsmith_(novel)</a> ). See also reference. <sup>5</sup> Also available in free e-book format (titled as: "Martin Arrowsmith").
"The Jungle" (Upton Sinclair)	1906	Descriptions of the poverty and harsh working conditions of the working class in early 20 <sup>th</sup> century America. Also deals with the corruption and lack of food safety in the American meatpacking industry. The public outcry in response to this novel contributed to new laws and establishing an agency that would become the Food and Drug Administration in the United States (see <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jungle">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jungle</a> ). Also available in free e-book format.

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