

Biographical approaches to clinical care

Clinical care often focuses on symptoms, tests, and guidelines. Yet every patient arrives with a personal story that shapes who they are, how they experience illness, and what they need from healthcare. In this talk, I will show how biographical approaches — methods that allow patients to share their life history and biographical identity — can improve communication, trust, and decision-making in clinical practice.

I will introduce the core ideas behind biographical methods and explain why they matter for person-centred care. I will also present findings from a recent project conducted in the surgery department of the Ente Ospedaliero Cantonale in Lugano, where we collected patients' life stories to improve care. This project showed that even brief biographical documents drafted by the patients can reveal important information that helps clinicians tailor care more effectively.

By combining theory and practical examples, I will invite participants to reflect on a simple question: what changes when we treat biography as part of clinical data — and what new possibilities for care emerge when we do?