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Abraham Verghese to Speak as Part of AIDS Awareness Week at Illinois Wesleyan

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Abraham Verghese, author of *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*, which chronicles the appearance of AIDS in society, will be the keynote speaker for AIDS Awareness Week at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Verghese's program will be on Thursday, Nov. 20, at 7 p.m. in the Hansen Student Center, 300 Beecher St., Bloomington, and is free and open to the public.

There will also be a reading of *My Own Country* on Monday, Nov. 17, at 8 p.m. in the circular room on the fourth floor of The Ames Library, 1 Ames Plaza East, Bloomington. Other AIDS Awareness Week events include a candlelight vigil on Tuesday, Nov. 18, at 8 p.m. at McPherson Beach on the Eckley Quadrangle and the AIDS Awareness Week chapel service on Wednesday, Nov. 19, at 11 a.m. at Evelyn Chapel, 1301 N. Park St., Bloomington.

In *My Own Country*, Verghese describes the emergence and effects of AIDS in Johnson City. Largely autobiographical, the book describes the lives of his patients and his own struggles between his personal and professional lives in relation to the disease. The book was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1994 and was made into a Showtime original movie.

"Verghese is a doctor who has been around AIDS for a large portion of his life," said Kevin Klean, Student Welfare and Human Relations Commissioner of IWU's Student Senate, the organization that is sponsoring Verghese's visit and AIDS Awareness Week. "Since he has an uncommon perspective coming from a medical background, students will be able to learn about the effects of AIDS, various treatments, and what developments have occurred with the disease."

At the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Verghese is currently the director of The Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics in the School of Medicine and a professor of medicine.

A native of Ethiopia, Verghese was born in 1955 to parents who were Indian immigrants. He attended medical school in Ethiopia and worked in various hospitals in the United States before completing his medical education in Madras, India. In 1980, he returned to the U.S., where he completed his residency in Johnson City, Tenn. In 1990, he worked at the University of Iowa's outpatient AIDS clinic. While there, he attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop and turned his experiences into his first book, *My Own Country*.

Verghese is also the author of *The Tennis Partner: A Story of Friendship and Loss* and has written for *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, *Sports Illustrated*, and medical journals. He has been the commencement speaker at many medical schools and holds a Doctor of Science honorary degree from Swarthmore College.

For additional information on Verghese's speech and AIDS Awareness Week at IWU, contact Klean at (309) 556-2874.