

A black silhouette of a person's head and upper body in profile, facing right. They are blowing on a dandelion seed head. The dandelion is held in their right hand, and several seeds are shown floating in the air above it. The background is white.

# Who counts?

Which groups counted as medically distinguishable populations?

Whose bodies mattered for these measurements?

Who were the normal subjects used to set a baseline of normal functioning?

Was normal breathing universal or varied between groups?

# THE NORMAL SUBJECTS

*'A respiratory physiologist offering a unitary explanation of breathlessness should arouse the same suspicions as a tattooed Archbishop offering a free ticket to heaven'* Campbell & Howell (1963)

- John Hutchinson (1811-1861)
- Vital capacity as proxy measurement for lung capacity
- Believed VC was impacted by height, attitude, weight, age, and disease



Lowne Spirometer  
© Thackray Medical Museum

# ASSESSING DISABILITY IN MINERS

*'The assessment of the effect of silicosis or pneumoconiosis on lung function implies a definition of normal with which to make the comparison. This is far more difficult than the scant reference [sic] in the literature would suggest'.*

Gilson & Hugh-Jones (1955)

- Medical surveys from 1936-1942 led by D'Arcy Hart and Aslett
- Reports (1942-1945) proved link between length of exposure to coal dust and respiratory disability
- The spirometer gave numerical evidence of respiratory disease for assessing compensation claims

Map of the South Wales coalfield showing the 16 collieries of the inquiry.

