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The Midnight Meal And Other Essays About Doctors, Patients, And Medicine (Conversations In Medicine And Society)



Synopsis

In this expanded edition, an accomplished physician and teacher of medicine discusses the importance of being a caring doctor, especially now that the focus of medicine is increasingly on technological innovation and health care costs. With wisdom and compassion, Dr. Jerome Lowenstein tells stories about relationships between medical students and their teachers, physicians and their patients. He reflects on what doctors learn from treating chronic illness; how they respond to patients' needs for reassurance; how they bear the burden of treating patients with life-threatening or degenerative disease; whether the distinction between traditional and "alternative" medical treatment is ultimately beneficial or destructive; and many other issues. Dr. Lowenstein's ruminations on humanistic approaches to learning and practicing medicine will be treasured by physicians, medical students, and patients alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For 15 years, Lowenstein has taught humanistic medicine to small groups of students and house staff at the New York University Medical Center. Most of these 23 brief essays come from this program. Lowenstein tries to broaden his students' outlook on the medical profession and their roles in it. He emphasizes the importance of a close, sensitive physician-patient relationship and of dependence on the mind rather than on the machine. He gives several excellent examples of patients as teachers and shows how patients and physicians can teach each other if minds and

emotions are kept open. One of his most insightful points is the distinction between the patient who wants advice and the patient who wants reassurance; any student or physician who can absorb this difference will be blessed by patients for years to come. The only problem with the book, which Lowenstein recognizes in the preface, is one of focus on audience; sometimes Lowenstein is talking to his colleagues, at others clearly to laypeople. William Beatty --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I was drawn to this book by the title; at our hospital, the "Midnight Meal" is somewhat of an institution much as it is described in Dr. Lowenstein's book. It is a time for the housestaff to congregate in a neutral area and shed the titles that usually stratify us. We become real people, if only for fifteen minutes, free to commiserate, pontificate, or luxuriate. Dr. Lowenstein has published a number of essays in his book which are thought-provoking and are based on his course in humanistic medicine. I found them more compelling for their anecdotal quality and less on their novelty or richness of language. For the latter, I might refer readers to Oliver Sacks or Lewis Thomas (although the latter is getting dated). It is easy to nod appreciatively at his statements, but another thing to agree wholeheartedly. For example, I'm not sure I have such a pessimistic view of alternative medicine as he does. Overall, a satisfying book (I finished it in about 2 hrs) but not one I think I will keep for my permanent library.

This book loses one star only because it can be jarring to move from one essay to the next. It more than makes up for that by being a book to savour -- for the quality of language used, precision in composition, and of course, content. The essays are reflective on the changes that have taken place in medical education in the past 30+ years, drawing on the author's experience and some historical record as well, and the sheer quality of how he ponders issues, with thought and succinct evaluation, is itself a reminder of what we lose in a highly digitalized age, where many doctors struggle with handwriting and even English itself. His stories are not the fast excitement of Atul Gawande, but slower, reminders to younger doctors that much of what medicine has become is not what it used to be, yet old debates are still surprisingly relevant.

A series of interesting vignettes by a New York internist/nephrologist on maintaining humanity in medicine. Written in a "from the hip" style, Dr. Lowenstein's book focuses on many of the pitfalls plaguing medicine today. With great and promising technological advances comes a loss of the human approach, something Dr. Lowenstein bemoans. Make no bones about it (no pun)--Dr.

Lowenstein does not call for a return to simpler times. However, his musings cause one to wonder if we have lost something special and important as the wheels of progress roll on. Many anecdotes on a range of subjects regarding the daily life of doctors make this book interesting reading for all, and especially for those contemplating entering the medical profession. With this book, Dr. Lowenstein certainly is not "holding the blood gas report", which is the title of one of "The Midnight Meal's" particularly poignant essays.

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