

Complications: Doctors Write about Their Experiences

Austin, Paul. ***Something for the Pain: One Doctor's Account of Life and Death in the Emergency Room***. W.W. Norton, 2008.

Austin chose to specialize in Emergency Room medicine, aware that it would mean hectic, rotating shifts of crucial decision-making but unprepared for the toll it would take on his psyche and his family.

Collins, Michael J. ***Hot Lights, Cold Steel: Life, Death and Sleepless Nights in a Surgeon's First Years***. St. Martin's Press, 2005.

Collins' account of his four years as an orthopedic resident at the Mayo Clinic hurtles along at breakneck speed, from his start as an anxious newbie, certain he is "the dullest scalpel in the drawer," learning to treat the physical injuries and their emotional consequences.

Harman, Patricia. ***Blue Cotton Gown: A Midwife's Memoir***. Beacon Press, 2008.

Harman writes about the patients in her West Virginia medical practice: 17-year old Heather, unmarried and pregnant with twins; Nila, estranged from her husband and pregnant for the 8th time; and Kasmar, a lesbian who wants a sex change. Despite her financial, health, and marital problems, she struggles to offer more than medical advice and treatment, telling their often heartbreaking stories with eloquence and insight.

Jadick, Richard with Thomas Hayden. ***On Call in Hell: A Doctor's Iraq War Story***. NAL, 2007. At thirty-eight, Jadick volunteered as a doctor in Iraq to fulfill a dream of serving in combat with the Marines. As battalion senior medical officer during the Battle of Fallujah, he set up a medical station in the thick of the fighting so Marines could be treated faster.

Jourdan, Carolyn. ***Heart in the Right Place***. Algonquin Books, 2007.

At forty, Carolyn Jourdan thought she had it all as a high-powered lawyer in Washington DC. When her mother had a heart attack, she promised to fill in for her as receptionist in her father's small-town East Tennessee family medical practice for "a few days." This new role made her think about how the value of the work brings meaning to our lives.

McCarthy, Claire. ***Learning How the Heart Beats: The Making of a Pediatrician***. Viking, 1995.

McCarthy always knew she wanted to be a pediatrician, but she wasn't prepared for how emotional it would be for her to treat sick children. It's emotional for us, too as McCarthy tells how she learned about the human side of medicine by listening to her heart and her patients.

Montross, Christine. ***Body of Work: Reflections on Human Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab.*** Penguin, 2007.

Every medical student survives the first year human anatomy class, a complete dissection of a human cadaver, but not everyone could write about the experience with such grace and insight. Montross shows how this difficult experience creates sensitive medical practitioners.

Siebert, Charles. ***A Man After His Own Heart: A True Story.*** Crown, 2004.

Siebert 's father died too young of heart disease and Siebert himself had several episodes of "coronary neurosis," anxiety attacks centered on the workings of his heart. In this fascinating written search to understand the physical and metaphysical nature of our hearts, he joins a transplant team and has the rare experience of touching a beating heart.

Trout, Nick. ***Tell Me Where it Hurts: A Day of Humor, Healing and Hope in My Life as an Animal Surgeon.*** Broadway, 2008.

This twenty-four hour glimpse into the life of a staff surgeon in a large Boston veterinary hospital begins with a late night phone request to help a German shepherd in distress and continues through a long day of examinations, tricky diagnoses, surgeries, and consultations with distraught pet owners.

Vergheese, Abraham. ***My Own Country.*** Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Vergheese, an African Indian doctor at a rural Tennessee hospital in the mid-1980s, found that a growing number of gay men suffering from AIDS were coming home from the cities to die in their conservative hometowns. His decision to focus on their care, help them find social services, and deal with their shocked families changed his life.

Some additional titles:

Gawande, Atul. ***Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance.*** Metropolitan Books, 2007.

Groopman, Jerome. ***How Doctors Think.*** Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Martensen, Robert. ***A Life Worth Living: A Doctor's Reflections on Illness in a High-Tech Era.***

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.