

Resources for Reflection on Health Disparities and Medical Humanities

Books

Many of these books are written by medical doctors either reflecting on their experience as residents, on becoming doctors, with patients and families, making mistakes, and so on. One book is a memoir written by a lawyer and has nothing to do with medicine, and everything to do with being human. Two items include pieces written by patients or their family members on the human aspects of clinical experiences.

You might disagree with some, none or all of what is said in these writings, or the politics of the writers themselves, but they offer multiple perspectives on a view into the heart of being human, remembering what it means to be a patient, and the import of these for being a physician.

Gawande, Atul. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End.* , 2014. *Print.*ⁱ

Medicine has triumphed in modern times, transforming birth, injury, and infectious disease from harrowing to manageable. But in the inevitable condition of aging and death, the goals of medicine seem too frequently to run counter to the interest of the human spirit. Nursing homes, preoccupied with safety, pin patients into railed beds and wheelchairs. Hospitals isolate the dying, checking for vital signs long after the goals of cure have become moot. Doctors, committed to extending life, continue to carry out devastating procedures that in the end extend suffering. Gawande, a practicing surgeon, addresses his profession's ultimate limitation, arguing that quality of life is the desired goal for patients and families. Gawande offers examples of freer, more socially fulfilling models for assisting the infirm and dependent elderly, and he explores the varieties of hospice care to demonstrate that a person's last weeks or months may be rich and dignified (Publisher's abstract).

Gawande, Atul. *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science.* New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002. *Print.*ⁱⁱ

*A brilliant and courageous doctor reveals, in gripping accounts of true cases, the power and limits of modern medicine. Sometimes in medicine the only way to know what is truly going on in a patient is to operate, to look inside with one's own eyes. This book is exploratory surgery on medicine itself, laying bare a science not in its idealized form but as it actually is -- complicated, perplexing, and profoundly human. Atul Gawande offers an unflinching view from the scalpel's edge, where science is ambiguous, information is limited, the stakes are high, yet decisions must be made. In dramatic and revealing stories of patients and doctors, he explores how deadly mistakes occur and why good surgeons go bad. He also shows us what happens when medicine comes up against the inexplicable: an architect with incapacitating back pain for which there is no physical cause a young woman with nausea that won't go away a television newscaster whose blushing is so severe that she cannot do her job. Gawande offers a richly detailed portrait of the people and the science, even as he tackles the paradoxes and imperfections inherent in caring for human lives. At once tough-minded and humane, *Complications* is a new kind of medical writing, nuanced and lucid, unafraid to confront the conflicts and uncertainties that lie at the heart of modern medicine, yet always alive to the possibilities of wisdom in this extraordinary endeavor (Publisher's abstract).*

Groopman, Jerome E. *How Doctors Think.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007. *Print.*ⁱⁱⁱ

A physician discusses the thought patterns and actions that lead to misdiagnosis on the part of healthcare providers, and suggests methods that patients can use to help doctors assess conditions more accurately (Publisher's abstract).

Voices of Autism: The Healing Companion: Stories for Courage, Comfort and Strength. New York: LaChance Pub, 2008. *Internet resource*^v

Offers thirty-nine true stories of lives transformed by autism, featuring essays written by patients and family affected by the disease (Publisher's abstract).

Jauhar, Sandeep. *Intern: A Doctor's Initiation.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. *Print.*

Jauhar recounts his days and nights in residency at a busy hospital in New York City, a trial that led him to question the quality of medical care today. His beautifully written memoir explains that modern medicine can be a humane science after all (Publisher's abstract).

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Kaminsky, Leah. *Writer, MD: The Best Contemporary Fiction and Nonfiction by Doctors*. New York: Vintage, 2012. *Print*.^v

From Chekhov to Maugham to William Carlos Williams, doctors have long given voice to their unique perspectives through literature. Writer, M.D. celebrates this rich tradition with a collection of fiction and nonfiction by today's most beloved physician-writers, including, Abraham Verghese, on the lost art of the physical exam Pauline Chen, on the bond between a med student and her first cadaver Atul Gawande, on the... (Publisher's abstract).

Klitzman, Robert. *When Doctors Become Patients*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. *Internet resource*^{vi}.

For many doctors, their role as powerful healer precludes thoughts of ever getting sick themselves. When they do, it initiates a profound shift of awareness-- not only in their sense of their selves, which is invariably bound up with the invincible doctor role, but in the way that they view their patients and the doctor-patient relationship. While some books have been written from first-person perspectives on ... (Publisher's abstract).

Ofri, Danielle. *The Best of the Bellevue Literary Review*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2008. *Internet resource*

Founded just six years ago, Bellevue Literary Review is already widely recognized as a rare forum for emerging and celebrated writers-among them Julia Alvarez, Raphael Campo, Rick Moody, and Abraham Verghese-on issues of health and healing. Gathered here are poignant and prizewinning stories, essays, and poems, the voices of patients and those who care for them, which form the journal's remarkable dialogue on "humanity and the human experience." (Publisher's abstract)

Vance, J D. *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. , 2016. *Print*.

Vance, a former marine and Yale Law School graduate, provides an account of growing up in a poor Rust Belt town that offers a broader, probing look at the struggles of America's white working class. The decline of this group, a demographic of our country that has been slowly disintegrating over forty years, has been reported on with growing frequency and alarm. J. D. Vance tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck. The Vance family story begins hopefully in postwar America. J. D.'s grandparents were "dirt poor and in love," and moved north from Kentucky's Appalachia region to Ohio in the hopes of escaping the dreadful poverty around them. They raised a middle-class family, and eventually their grandchild (the author) would graduate from Yale Law School, a conventional marker of their success in achieving generational upward mobility. But as the family saga of Hillbilly Elegy plays out, we learn that this is only the short, superficial version. Vance's grandparents, aunt, uncle, sister, and, most of all, his mother, struggled profoundly with the demands of their new middle-class life, and were never able to fully escape the legacy of abuse, alcoholism, poverty, and trauma so characteristic of their part of America (Publisher's abstract).

Young, Audrey. *What Patients Taught Me: A Medical Student's Journey*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2004. *Print*.^{vii}

The author shares stories from her work as a student at the University of Washington Medical School where she participated in a special program that sent medical students to work in rural areas, discussing her experiences in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, and South Africa (Publisher's abstract).

Audio Resource

Figure 0-1 Click to listen!



Resources for Reflection on Health Disparities and Medical Humanities

ⁱ @ AHS Library; UA Science & Engineering Library

ⁱⁱ @ AHS Library; Pima County Public Library; VA Admin Medical Center, Tucson

ⁱⁱⁱ @ AHS Library

^{iv} Offers thirty-nine true stories of lives transformed by autism, featuring essays written by patients and family affected by the disease.

^v @ UA Science & Engineering Library; Pima County Public Library

^{vi} eBook: ezproxy.library.arizona.edu; Print: @ AHS Library

^{vii} @ AHS Library