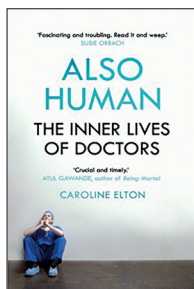


Life & Times Books

Also Human: The Inner Lives of Doctors Caroline Elton

*William Heinemann, 2018, HB, 400pp,
£16.99, 978-1785150906*



ALL TOO HUMAN

This timely, passionately argued book made for a challenging read, exploring and exposing many of the more difficult aspects of doctors' lives. Caroline Elton is a psychologist whose experience leading the Careers Unit for trainees in London has given her insights that she now shares, hoping to show that 'doctors are people too'. One trainee crashes her car twice, so desperate is she to escape the hospital where she is treating patients with the disease that killed her father, and another is baffled by the lack of empathy from other obstetricians to her failed fertility treatment. The cases come thick and fast, covering such a variety of situations that I suspect all doctors will find a topic that resonates personally. I know I did.

The discussions framed by the cases address many important issues in medicine. Written before Dr Bawa-Garba's plight hit the headlines, this book contains a prescient exploration of discrimination in medicine and the difficult conditions within which many junior doctors work. Although many of the points are raised without solutions, the author does suggest some potential approaches, such as looking to the trainee intern year in New Zealand to provide a model for transition between medical school and foundation years.

Overall, I would have found this book more readable with tighter editing and fewer stories simply resolved by doctors leaving medicine, but that should not detract from the importance of what Elton has to say. Non-medics may approach this book with fascination, yet for those of us already intimately familiar with the medical

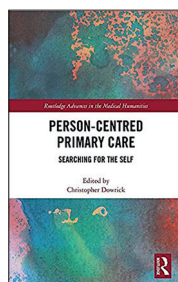
world I would suggest approaching it with some trepidation and a good friend to talk with about the issues it raises. Whether or not you agree with Elton's observations and arguments, all of them give opportunities to reflect on the habitually dismissed consequences of doctors also being human. Now we need to start doing something about them!

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Person-Centred Primary Care: Searching for the Self Christopher Dowrick

*Routledge, 2017, HB, 192pp, £115.00, 978-
1138244184*



CRITICAL REFLECTION

This book brings together some of the most interesting general practice writers and researchers from the UK and Europe with a collection of seven essays that explore the nature of the person, or self, and our attempts to attend to it in clinical consultations. Deborah Swinglehurst's chapter describes her research into the ways in which electronic patient records demand our attention and interrupt consultations. Her findings will be immediately familiar to frustrated patients and clinicians. Her methodology — linguistic ethnography — is a great example of how scholarship can reveal what happens in the swampy lowlands of general practice.

Defining the person (or self) on which we aspire to centre care proves to be challenging. Like the generalists they are, the authors draw on a rich mix of neuroscience, history, philosophy, clinical

practice, and social sciences research to think deeply about theory and practice. Clinical vignettes provide material to work with, and, although some sections of the book venture into the theoretical high ground, others like Joanne Reeve's chapter are full of practical suggestions.

I would have liked more on what happens when we have different selves that we are ashamed of, a problem that plagues perfectionists and addicts, doctors and patients alike. I would also have liked to read more from patients' perspectives, especially given that the book begins by introducing epistemic justice — the ability for patients to give their own account and explain its meaning and significance. A more explicit account of empathy could have helped show how epistemic justice can be achieved in practice. With the book being priced so high I fear that it will reach too few reflective GPs or trainees, and even fewer patients.

Where the book succeeds is in challenging the reader to think seriously about the ways in which power and assumptions are everywhere in everyday practice. This critical reflection makes us engaged and resilient.

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What's in a Story? Lessons from Reflections in General Practice David Orlans, Rodger Charlton, and Samuel Finnikin

*Hampton-In-Arden Publishing, 2017, PB,
362pp, £10.00, 978-0954560447*

