

Book review

LEARNING MEDICINE, 17TH EDITION

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'So, why do you want to become a doctor?' A moment wistfully remembered from many a medical school interview. Many readers will indeed have asked this question themselves and waited curiously for the response. Although seeming to invite regurgitated answers, it remains a good question if its anticipation serves to encourage applicants to seriously consider what they might be letting themselves in for. Hopefully, they will have read *Learning Medicine*.

While for generation X, television doctors Guy Secretan and Luka Kovac may have displaced Lancelot Spratt and James Kildare, it remains important to separate media glamourisation from fact. Unless one comes from a medical background, the realities of lengthy postgraduate training and life-long continual professional development need to be revealed. As such, the book's strength derives from its concentration on what lies beyond university, rather than as an admissions primer.

Learning Medicine starts by taking the reader through the various considerations of choosing an appropriate course (or not), the admissions process and life as an undergraduate (including illuminating vignettes on problem-based learning and communication skills).

It goes on to explain the structure of the new Foundation Programme and its impact on working conditions, training and pay. Issues of work/life balance and flexible training are discussed alongside the gamut of career paths and their training requirements. In this respect, general practice is presented as an attractive option with opportunities for special interests and

choice in where and when to work.

Reflecting the GMC's introduction of law and ethics into the curriculum, there is a new chapter written by a barrister, on professional privileges, obligations and responsibilities. Junior doctors and current students in particular will find the sagacious advice regarding professionalism and complaints a concise and practical resource in avoiding potential pitfalls.

The text is punctuated throughout with a number of frank, personal accounts from doctors and students at all stages of their careers as well as Larry's wry cartoons. The appendices contain pertinent extracts from GMC guidance as well as web addresses for medical schools and access course providers.

It defies pigeon-holing as solely for sixth-formers (and their parents) due to its broad career advice. Widening access has encouraged more mature students to enter medicine, many of whom are retraining from other health professions. The proliferation of 4-year, graduate-entry courses and the opening of several new schools have resulted in courses that vary widely in the way they are delivered and careful consideration is needed as to their suitability for individuals.

Senior doctors are often the first port of call for advice for those in training and this book provides an up-to-date reference, incorporating the reforms of Modernising Medical Careers. Anyone who teaches students or junior doctors may be recommended to read it and update themselves on the many changes in medical education that have recently taken effect and the options they present.

That *Learning Medicine* has been continually published since 1983 stands testament to the book's continuing usefulness and relevance. The profession's future success rests on attracting the right people to the right courses and ultimately them being happy in their choice of speciality.

Daniel Pearlman