

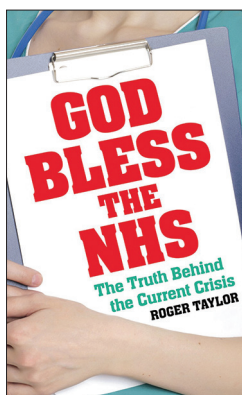
Out of Hours Books

GOD BLESS THE NHS

ROGER TAYLOR

Faber & Faber, 2013

PB, 336pp, £9.99 978-0571303649



As a GP who defected to Canada, 'God Bless the NHS' are words I have never uttered; it is a sentiment felt deeply however by many patients, who have an enduring love affair with this most British of institutions.

In his thoughtful book, Roger Taylor, co-founder of Dr Foster, provides a wide-ranging discourse on the NHS.

Beginning with a discussion around the 290 recommendations from the Francis Report into mid-Staffs (enough to 'make the man and woman in the Clapham GP's waiting room despair'), he explores our relationship with the health service, arguing it is 'part of our national story ... part of our national myth'; proposing the NHS is not an unusual healthcare system, but what is odd is our connection with it.

He describes politicians as intent on reform, at a time when patient satisfaction has never been higher. David Cameron is described as being 'like a creepily possessive boyfriend' when he declaimed 'it's because I love the NHS so much that I want to change it'. Yet change it must, Taylor argues, despite the protestations of 'sustainability deniers'. He focuses (perhaps unduly) on advancement in medical technology as the cause of rising costs.

He touches on the conflict between medicine and money, clinical freedom, clinical variation, and referral centres, which he thinks 'combine the worst of all possible worlds', reviews the role of the

private sector proceeds via cataract surgery in India, and writes about centralisation of specialised services and the need for politicians to make unpopular decisions.

Tackling the difficult question of whether good care can be measured, Taylor suggests that the only way is for as much data to be obtained as possible and for it to be analysed in a subtle, nuanced way, akin to Francis.

Reasonably, he says that data should be used to inform judgement, not as a substitute for judgement, but who should bell the cat in the absence of a bench of QCs available for quotidian NHS decision making? Taylor thinks that it should be the patient.

The last part of the book is less persuasive. His answer of better access to medical records and idealistic patient empowerment, with patients contributing to their own medical records, discussing their health not with one doctor but with 'a number of doctors who are expert in their areas of knowledge', through a 'medical service ... that can put you in contact with whoever you need — by phone, online, or in person — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week' is unconvincing.

Not many patients will have the wherewithal of Jill Maben, a nursing professor who used the internet to track down an Australian surgeon for her son, disabled by epilepsy from a hypothalamic hamartoma. The great strength of the internet is ease of access to information, but there is no quality control. His assertion that the most powerful source of information is other patients is only true to a point. In Taylor's own terms, this would seem to be relying too much on a single data source.

Ultimately he is guilty of making the same mistakes of which he accuses others, confusing medical technology, healthcare institutions, and individuals, when he plaintively laments:

'The NHS has the power to destroy a brain tumour with radiation and replace a malfunctioning heart with an artificial one; Yet at the same time it is capable of leaving a patient crying in agony all night because there is no-one available to provide pain control.'

As may be expected from Taylor's background the analysis is sound and

thought-provoking, even if his solutions are rather nebulous, and *God Bless The NHS* is a worthwhile read.

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FLYING WITH CONFIDENCE: THE PROVEN PROGRAMME TO FIX YOUR FLYING FEARS

PATRICIA FURNESS-SMITH AND
CAPTAIN STEVE ALLRIGHT

Vermillion, 2013

PB, 224pp, £10.99 978-0091947859



Flying with Confidence is a 200-page paperback written by Patricia Furness-Smith, a psychologist and specialist in flying phobias, and Captain Steve Allright, a British Airways (BA) pilot with 20 years flying experience.

BA has been running a 'Flying with Confidence' course for 25 years but as a place on the course costs from £250 this book at £10.99 is a more affordable guide to help overcome the anxieties and phobias people may have about flying.

The book is divided into two sections with the first part covering the technical side of flying while the second provides the reader with tools to overcome their fears. The style is easy to read and comprehend. Key points appear boxed and highlighted and contain

one or two sentences to ensure the reader has grasped the salient point. Diagrams are illustrative and without too much detail. The use of analogies to relate everyday actions and experiences to those of flight are helpful.

An entire chapter is given over to turbulence and weather that for many anxious fliers causes great distress. Many of the scenarios that are expanded on are extremely rare. Even for the experienced flier it is helpful to know Captain Allright's diversion ratings, which are given out of 10, for such conditions as ice and thunderstorms through to a plane being hit by lightning. None scores more than 3/10.

For many, despite the theory, how to master their fear is what is more important. Patricia Furness-Smith explains phobias and why they manifest. She likens the medical term phobia to an imp and uses this analogy to link an image that the reader can easily identify with. This use of analogy is developed further when she describes the lower brain, the limbic system, and the neocortex. The amygdala is likened to 'The General' and the autonomic nervous system.

Throughout the book there are short case histories further allowing the reader to identify with stressful situations that occur when having to take a flight. Panic attacks and the resulting emotional and physical symptoms are listed in detail to enable the reader to then use the 'toolbox' of techniques that are categorised using the letter 'R'. These are React, Regulate, Relax, and Rehearse.

The final sections of the book cover the 'how to'. There are detailed techniques that use cognitive behavioural therapy and breathing as the main methods of reducing stress and panic. Guided visualisation and positive thought are further techniques used to induce relaxation before the reader takes an imaginary trip that leaves home, encompasses check-in and boarding, the in-flight experience, and finally landing. This trip is interwoven with the exercises that previously the reader had practised.

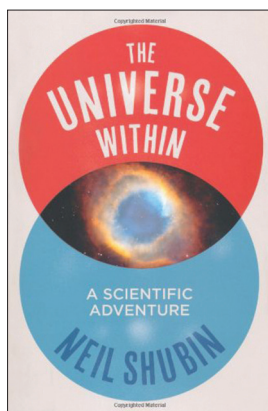
This book is a useful adjuvant, that I, as a GP, could recommend to the phobic or fearful flier alongside the possible prescription for an anxiolytic. Explanations and practical techniques aim to give the anxious flier control over their destiny and to reclaim part of their lost life.

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**THE UNIVERSE WITHIN
A SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURE
NEIL SHUBIN**

Allen Lane, 2013
PB, 240pp, £20.00 978-1846142208



The Universe Within, by renowned palaeontologist Neil Shubin, is a short book about big topics. The goal of the book, as the dust jacket says, is to show how 'the one place where universe, solar system and planet merge is inside your body'. This is an enigmatic claim, and having read the book I'm still not entirely clear what it means.

This is not such a big issue, however, for Shubin takes us on a fascinating journey through the history of our universe, the formation of our solar system, the forces that created the earth and moon, and the evolutionary history of our planet — all in 200 easy-to-read pages! This is no small feat.

The book is arranged chronologically, and starts 13.7 billion years ago with the birth of the universe in the Big Bang. Shubin explains, in admirably clear terms, how the ball of energy that was the very early universe gave rise to simple elements like hydrogen, helium, and lithium.

Much later, heavier atoms such as carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen — so important in the biochemistry of Earth's organisms — were formed in fusion reactions deep in the heart of stars. When these element-forming stars exploded as supernovae, they spread out their atomic creations, which were eventually incorporated into the bodies of every creature on the planet. We are truly made of star dust.

Shubin has many more stories to tell than can be summarised in a short review.

He describes the formation of our solar system; how the 24-hour day/night cycle has led to the evolution of molecular body clocks in many species; how climatic changes 2 billion years ago set the stage for the evolution of multicellular animals; the role of continental drift in the history of our planet; and much, much more.

Throughout, Shubin's writing remains light and engaging, and the narrative is filled with thumbnail sketches of great and lesser-known scientists, as well as tales from Shubin's own paleontological adventures in the field. Although I felt that the 'universe within' conceit is a bit overstretched, this is a wonderfully broad-ranging, mind-expanding book. Read it, and you will better appreciate how intimately your existence is tied to the deep history of our universe.

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