

Janet, and Charcot and drops interesting historical tidbits here and there, such as how a fall from a horse led to the discovery of EEG, and how Hippocrates attempted to cure illness by analysing dreams 2000 years before Freud. Similarly, Dr O'Sullivan explains complex medical phenomena, investigations, and treatments in ways that are clear for both the lay person and the non-specialist medic.

Perhaps more important is the effort to de-stigmatise these conditions. The book is filled with examples of patients who resist their diagnosis because of the perceived stigma of having an illness that they feel many will think they are faking, and in many cases their resistance is backed up by the opinions of other doctors. After all, as the author points out, how can we expect patients to accept a diagnosis that many doctors will not?

The World Health Organization estimates that up to one in three patients attend their GP with medically unexplained symptoms so, as GPs, how can we afford to ignore the wisdom contained in these pages?

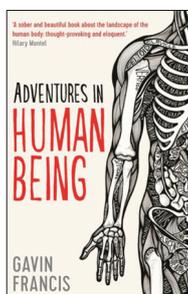
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Adventures In Human Being Gavin Francis

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THE BODY, AFRESH

My previous consulting room looked out onto grass, flowering cherry, hawthorn, and laurel. On late spring days the blossom would catch my eye, blowing like confetti over the nodding daisies, in the small sunlit pauses between one patient and the next. This book is like those moments: acute, contemplative, reviving.

Gavin Francis has clearly taken a meandering route to general practice. Richness in life experiences may not be part of the official selection criteria, or indeed of the curriculum, but here is an elegant exposition of how it can deepen our empathy towards the stream of humanity that will wash over us during our career. He joins a rich heritage of doctors combining literary with medical work too: a quote from

John Berger adorns the dust jacket; though the late Dannie Abse is the prototype conjured by my mind in this context.

Here, his third book delivers a delicate interweaving of narratives, well-researched information and ideas, each chapter focusing on a different body part. Much originates from his own experiences and yet Francis keeps himself from being the subject, remaining instead the observer, the commentator, the informant.

Most interesting for me is his delving into our tendency to forget how contingent all knowledge is. His description of the context to Epley's breakthrough with vertigo is a case in point. It also underlies his telling of the many traditions relating to the afterbirth, including the switch in Britain from viewing it as waste to seeing it instead as a source of stem cells. And it is there in the revelation that footprints in Tanzania overturned previous beliefs that hominid brain development necessarily preceded the ability to walk upright.

My new consulting room has a far less enticing aspect. I have been reminded, though, that interest and beauty are often found where least suspected.

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