new discoveries have revolutionised our understanding of emotion and sensation. We learn that pain, and all the sensations ascending in the contralateral pathway, target the emotional brain, not the sensory cortex, so representing emotions rather than sensations; indeed inflammation (interleukines, cytokines), and hypoxia, itch metabolites, plus many others, similarly feed into the emotional brain. We learn that these bodily emotions, positive (that is, affiliative touch — see below) and negative (that is, pain) feed into 2 opposite emotional cortical areas, the left and right insulae respectively, one in each hemisphere, which perform a power calculation by opposing (inhibiting) each other; the negative inhibits the positive and vice versa; ultimately this summated (positive minus negative) power decides if we approach or withdraw from our environment.

This opposition explains how happiness and touch can reduce inflammation and pain, and how pain and inflammation can cause depression. We learn that the 'fine' touch fibres ascending in the contralateral pathway actually represent a newly-isolated affiliative social bonding system centred on the hairy parts of the body, upper arms, shoulder and back, it has as many nerve endings as the classical somatosensory cortical system of touch, but again this system heads for the emotional areas. This boosts the positive emotional power in the touched and inhibits pain. When we see another person in distress our natural emotional response will be to touch these areas; for a baby with colic we will stroke the back, in a distressed patient recalling trauma, we touch the upper arm.

This is just a flavour of the many new biological concepts Craig has researched and elucidated that, in my opinion, all doctors should understand, as they provide powerful new insights into mood disorders. Craig is the man who discovered how it all fits together, this is the new face of neurobiology. The book provides a fascinating and compelling account and will change your perception of the relationship between mind and body, and of yourself as a human being.

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Doctors Dissected
Jane Haynes and Martin Scurr
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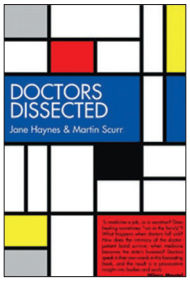

A BLUNT DISSECTION

I was really looking forward to reading this book; with its attractive Mondrian-inspired cover, the Hilary Mantel recommendation, and the promise of analysis and insight into what makes doctors tick by an experienced clinician and psychotherapist author team. Unfortunately the book doesn't quite live up to the billing. At best it's an engaging read about the personal stories of individuals as they struggle with relationships with their parents, partners, and at work. There are global themes about ambition, sexuality, personal tragedy, and love, but in many cases the fact that the protagonists are doctors feels peripheral to the narratives.

I initially felt rather cheated as the book consists primarily of the edited transcripts of interviews with a series of doctors, mostly GPs, by the psychotherapist author. I longed for some robust analysis (and even a description of method — how were these doctors selected?) It is perhaps revealing that a footnote explaining the Milwaukee Brace references Wikipedia.

I felt rather uncomfortable with some passing comments, such as the mention by one doctor of '*... the ambitious Jewish boys*', and the prescribing by an author for a family member with a genetic kidney condition to avoid a 'time wasting' visit to the GP. Priests are described as '*... the most anxious, the most hysterical and the hardest to control [as patients]*', and nuns don't fare much better: '*... very spiteful, competitive and hysterical*'. But I suppose the book allows us to access these doctors' perceptions and opinions unfiltered by the usual degree of self-moderation, with many describing historical practices and behaviours.

Indeed, recalling her own GP when her children were young, one author describes, '*Dr Smith, who spent his days in pinstripes, wafted Eau Sauvage and stole wet-lipped kisses from some of his lady patients*'.

And there are some particularly vivid recollections from a bygone era, such as the description of a pathologist producing a dead baby from his brown leather briefcase and proceeding to dissect it in front of his stunned audience of juniors.

There are questionable statements too by the authors: I'm not sure many GPs would agree (as they squeeze in a forth or fifth home visit between surgeries) that '*... it is becoming rare for doctors ever to enter their patients' homes*', or that GPs '*... immediately make referrals when it is something that is not routine*'. Others might take issue with how the authors appear to present private general practice as the only feasible way to provide truly patient-centred care.

So why does this book fall short? In addition to the lack of scholarship, probably because it seeks to do too much, and appears to have prejudged some of the questions it sets out to answer. Where it succeeds most is in painting a vibrant picture of the challenges, failures, and development of a number of professionals as they make their way in life, set against the ever-changing backdrop of medicine.

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