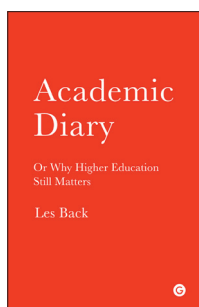


Out of Hours Books

Academic Diary: Or Why Higher Education Still Matters

Les Back

Goldsmiths Press, 2016, PB, 272pp, £9.95, 978-1906897581



DON'T MAKE GRADES YOUR ONLY GOAL

Les Back, a Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, has published insights into higher education in the form of a diary of the academic year. The diary consists of around 50 short essays that will be of interest to anyone involved in teaching students.

Targets, assessments, market forces, information overload, and audit are some of the challenges facing university educators. Among the many jewels are six tips for students: listen but don't be silent; don't make grades your only goal; read and buy books; don't try to do it all the night before; don't just be a consumer; and follow your interests.

Les Back describes lectures as monologues rather than dialogues and reminds us that even the most brilliant lecturers are all too human. He has a humorous take on 'Death by PowerPoint' and the entries on welcome week and open days are of relevance to the university setting.

Les Back's humanity and ability to inspire students are apparent in the more personal entries, a favourite pen, the writer's desk, and the 'library angel' being some of the themes. He is incisive in his criticism of conferences as places of self-promotion, and of 'academic absenteeism' as a hallmark of 'being in demand' (academics who are often away from their university attending conferences). He warns us of the dangers of specialisation and reflects on an editorial reviewing process that can be unnecessarily cruel at times.

He urges teachers and supervisors to

have a receptive generosity and not to treat students as suspects. His diary ends with a useful list of tips, leads, and follow-ups including references to the work of some of his heroes, including Primo Levi and John Berger.

Academic Diary is a beautifully written resource of wisdom and humanity, and is a joy to dip into.

David Jeffrey,

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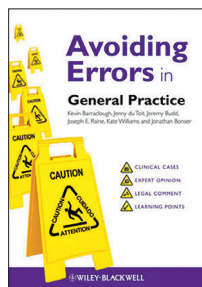
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Avoiding Errors in General Practice

Kevin Barraclough

Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, PB, 198pp, £31.99, 978-0470673577



COMMON THINGS ARE COMMON

I first read this book in 2013 as a GP registrar, learning from unfortunate mistakes made by doctors, much to my dismay. However, reading this book again in 2016 (as a refresher) and now a practising GP, I have further appreciation for the relevance of the book, given how today's society is fraught with medicolegal pitfalls and litigation.

The authors include GPs, lawyers, and a former head of the Claims and Legal Department of the Medical Protection Society. The book does what its synopsis states: '... identifies and explains the most common errors likely to occur ... so that you won't make them'. It discusses medical negligence and causes of error, and it details the investigation process surrounding a complaint and the legal representation and

support that doctors can seek. However, the crux of the book consists of 40 clinical cases (all of which could likely present to a GP in surgery or out-of-hours). The book goes on to explain the medical error of each case supported by medicolegal advice, with useful take-home messages. The references supplied after each case facilitate further reading.

Reading this book made me debate the old adage that 'common things are common'. In reality, doctors should expand their differential diagnoses to consider what could be the most serious, in order to eliminate anything more worrying, for example, Case 25 — patient died of pneumonia when initially diagnosed as viral. During my read, I became aware of certain guidelines requiring updating, for example, Case 20 — microscopic haematuria — updated with NICE guidance in 2015 (understandable given publication of this book was in 2013 and is yet to receive a revised edition).

There is potential negativity towards this book in that it could instil an element of disheartenment among GPs, with the various complaints and litigation described. This may lead GPs to practise more defensively and perhaps become disillusioned with their vocation.

Ultimately, I feel this book provides an opportunity to learn from the errors, making ourselves safer doctors, and, in turn, ensuring patient safety.

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