

# Life & Times Books

## **Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup**

**John Carreyrou**

*Picador, 2019, PB, 320pp, £9.99, 978-1509868087*



### **TO PERSUADE AND DECEIVE**

A chilling account of one woman's mission to become a self-made billionaire, *Bad Blood* is an exceptional demonstration of courageous journalism by John Carreyrou. Elizabeth Holmes was named by *Forbes* magazine as the youngest self-made female billionaire in the US after her company, Theranos, was valued at \$9 billion in 2014. Carreyrou paints a disturbing image of Holmes's desire to attain financial success above all else: a Stanford drop-out, Holmes had had a string of entrepreneurial ventures (and failings) before focusing her ambitions on Theranos — a company set up to 'revolutionise' blood testing using a single drop of blood from a finger prick. Perhaps most disturbing was how far Holmes was prepared to go to secure her own financial success; despite a string of problems with the device, she continued to deceive investors with her cunning charm and calculated omissions of the facts. With friends in high places and a striking ability to manipulate rich men, the money kept on coming. Holmes was a master of deception; her vision and charisma her only selling point, for the technology she so desperately desired would never work. Finger-prick testing was never successful, and full blood draws were always needed, which were then run on established commercial analysers to give accurate results. Laboratory technicians who raised concerns were promptly fired, forced to sign comprehensive non-disclosure agreements, and frogmarched out of the building. Any employee found discussing Theranos's activities outside of the workplace was slapped with an entirely unaffordable lawsuit and personal threats. Holmes would stop at nothing to get what she wanted, even

if it meant putting the health of the public at risk or driving employees to suicide.

*Bad Blood* is a worrying account of the power of persuasion, reiterating the essential need for critical and expert review of medical devices prior to their use within the public domain. With Holmes now facing a prison sentence for fraud, this book is a stark reminder to us all that success in health care must be far more than an enchanting pitch from a deluded visionary.

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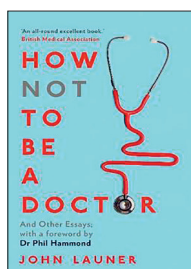
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp19X706937>

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## **How Not to be a Doctor and Other Essays**

**John Launer**

*Duckworth Overlook, 2019, PB, 256pp, £9.99, 978-0715653364*



### **GOOD DOCTORING**

*'Listen to the patient. He is telling you the diagnosis.'* (19th-century physician William Osler)

Only around 1-in-10 of the million people who visit NHS GPs every weekday have their symptoms further investigated in secondary care. So what of the 90% who are not referred? Do they feel less worried, cared for, and more able to cope with their symptoms when they leave the surgery? As we know, this is a complex process and involves listening, acknowledgement, and communication skills.

The problem with the training of doctors is that so much of it takes place in hospitals with the 10% of people who have already become 'patients', and by specialist doctors whose job it is to understand their symptoms in terms of defined medical diseases. So how do doctors learn about how to help the 90% majority? Dr John Launer has been one of those many broadminded and imaginative teachers who have worked to hone that understanding,

helping GPs to be better general practice doctors and not just hospital-trained doctors. This book of 54 short, concise essay pieces is very readable and can be dipped into whenever one has a few minutes to spare and time to reflect, with insights for patients too. A quick glance down the intriguing titles of the essays in the book's contents will grab anyone's attention and draw them in. Ideas range from how capitalism is influencing health care to acknowledging our deepest, secret sexual desires. If that alone doesn't insist that the reader must beg, buy, or borrow this book, I don't know what will!

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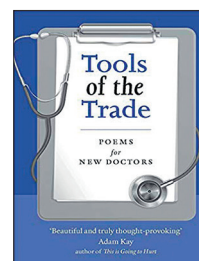
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## **Tools of the Trade: Poems for New Doctors (Third Edition)**

**Lesley Morrison, John Gillies, Samuel Tongue, and Ali Newell (eds)**

*Polygon Press, 2019, PB, 96pp, £6.99, 978-1846974885*



### **LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AND OTHERS**

Five years ago I reviewed the first edition of this book of poems designed to be carried in the pocket of newly qualified doctors. I thought it was a brilliant idea and am delighted to see it is still going strong in its third edition as a resource to turn to for inspiration, comfort, and even guidance during a working day — or unwinding after it. It still weighs in at just 96 pages, so what's new in this edition? There are prefaces by the editors and sponsor (MDDUS) and an introduction by Gavin Francis. Notes are included on some of the poets and by some of the poets themselves on their poems. Poems are also grouped together in five sections — looking after yourself, looking after others, beginnings, being with illness, and endings. Having mourned my own

father's death earlier this year it wasn't surprising that I found some of the poems in the final section particularly resonated with me. Denise Levertov is a wonderful poet and 'Talking to Grief' is a powerful metaphorical evocation of loss:

*Ah, grief, I should not treat you  
like a homeless dog  
who comes to the back door  
for a crust, for a meatless bone.  
I should trust you.*

It is not loss in death but decline though dementia that many readers will also identify with in Bob Hicok's 'Alzheimer's':  
*Chairs move by themselves, and books.  
Grandchildren visit, stand new and nameless,  
their faces' puzzles missing pieces.*

However, this edition is shot through with plenty of joy as well. In Jo McDougall's 'Mammogram', after receiving the all-clear from the surgeon, the patient in the poem gives vent to her relief:

*I pull on my radiant clothes.  
I step into the Hanging Gardens, the Taj  
Mahal,  
the Niagara Falls of the parking lot.*

Czesław Miłosz's 'Gift' is a dizzying dance of delight in simply being alive:

*A day so happy.  
Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.  
Hummingbirds were stopping over the  
honeysuckle flowers.  
There was no thing on earth I wanted to  
possess.*

*I knew no one worth my envying him.  
Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.*

If only a fraction of the readers of this wonderful anthology enter their surgeries and clinics with this kind of spirit each day, this book may do more to help the NHS be a better place to work in than the many grand schemes costing millions.

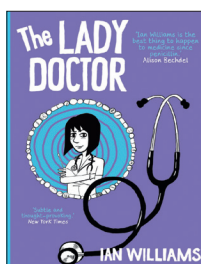
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### The Lady Doctor Ian Williams

Myriad Editions (Graphic Novels), 2019, PB,  
224pp, £14.99, 978-0993563362



### PROFESSIONAL INSIGHT

It's a brave move for a male doctor, in today's highly sensitive climate, to dare to tell the story of Lois, a 40-year-old female divorcee, salaried GP, and sexual health doctor. *The Lady Doctor*, follow-up to Ian Williams's debut *The Bad Doctor*, is a fast-paced graphic novel, which follows the twists and turns of 'lady' doctor Lois's work and home

life in a rural Welsh community.

Should she go into partnership with her two male colleagues who see her as a safe bet now her biological clock has run out? What to do about her estranged mother who's suddenly back in touch and needing a liver transplant? And then there are her one-night-stands and dysfunctional relationships, her dubious coping mechanisms, the nippings-out for a smoke, the downing of wine after work, not to mention the drug addicts and STI-ridden patients who keep knocking on her clinical door.

Weaving its way through the ethically challenging antics of this book is a very human, at times hilarious, and insightful narrative of a woman you can't help but grow to love. The messy mix of Lois's personal brokenness and that of her patients is touching, and the issue of addiction, in its many forms, is faced head on. Important ethical and professional issues are tackled with a lightness of touch through comic art, a medium that doesn't distract from their weightiness. And the GP surgeries represented in cartoon form had me laughing out loud. The professional insights of Ian Williams, who was a GP for 20 years, are apparent throughout.

But does Lois epitomise 'lady doctors'? I hope not! Does she face realistic professional challenges in her life? Oh yes. And does this male doctor/author/artist get away with it? As far as I'm concerned, yes, he does ... by the skin of his teeth!

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