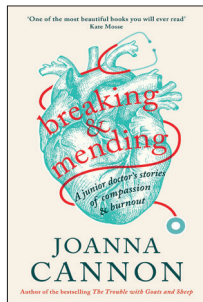


Life & Times Books

Breaking & Mending: A Junior Doctor's Stories of Compassion & Burnout

Joanna Cannon

Wellcome Collection, 2019, HB, 176pp,
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CARE FOR THE CARERS

Any doctor who reads *Breaking & Mending*, Joanna Cannon's memoir of life as a junior doctor, will find something that both resonates and educates. In candid detail she charts her progress from medical school, through the maelstrom of a busy A&E department, to walking the lonely hospital corridors at night. In a series of vignettes we observe her kindness, whether she is holding the hand of a dying patient or carefully measuring how to deliver bad news. However, her frank admission that 'compassion is something to be desired and applauded but it will eat away at your sanity' proves true when she is forced, by sheer exhaustion and burnout, to contemplate

whether medicine is her preferred career choice. When she finds her vocation in psychiatry it is her patients who come to her rescue.

There is much to learn here, whether it is in recognising the weight of certain words like 'sorry', or reflecting on how we define professional boundaries. Not only are good communication skills illustrated beautifully, but this book also highlights the importance of looking after the care-givers. It reminds us to be kind to ourselves as medical professionals, and that self-doubt in doctors is not only normal but also healthy.

Stress and burnout — subjects that were previously taboo — are handled with sensitivity, skill, and raw honesty by the author. Cannon challenges the assumption that doctors are infallible and deserves praise for having the courage to expose what many doctors have experienced but have felt unable to articulate.

While 'wellbeing', 'resilience', and 'mindfulness' are words that feature prominently in the modern medical student's lexicon, and UK medical schools now incorporate vows on 'wellbeing' into graduation oaths,¹ stress and burnout continue to burden our healthcare professionals. In 2016, as part of the GP Forward View plan, nearly £20 m was invested in GP mental health services aimed at GPs suffering stress. Since its launch in 2017, the GP Health service has

far exceeded its estimated commissioning target in terms of GPs seen.²

Unlike other medical memoirs that might seek to entertain or politicise, this book moved me close to tears as I recalled some of my own past encounters with patients.

Cannon is also the author of the hugely successful books *The Trouble with Goats and Sheep* and *Three Things About Elsie*, both bestselling novels that shine a light on the foibles of human behaviour.

It is easy to understand why the author went into medicine, because 'it is all about people, and people are made out of stories'.

In *Breaking & Mending* she should be applauded for sharing hers.

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