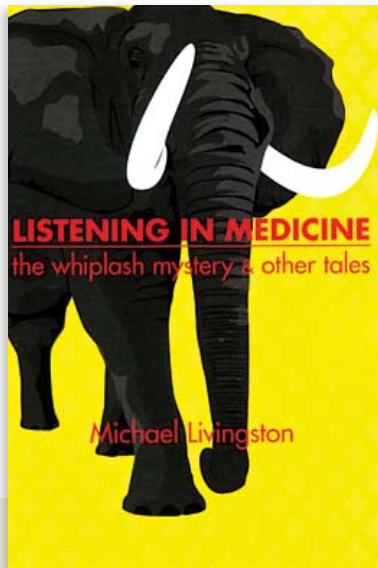


Listening in medicine: the whiplash mystery and other tales

AUTHOR Michael Livingston
PUBLISHER Trafford Publishing, 6E—2333 Government St, Victoria, BC V8T 4P4;
TELEPHONE 888 232-4444;
FAX 250 383-6804;
WEBSITE www.trafford.com
PUBLISHED 2005/pp 220/\$24.95



OVERALL RATING Good

STRENGTHS Enjoyable; wonderful stories; good material to share with students

WEAKNESSES A bit fragmented

AUDIENCE Family physicians (especially those who teach students)

If you're like me and like stories about family medicine, then you'll enjoy this book. *Listening in Medicine* is an eclectic collection of short stories or anecdotes about Michael Livingston's own long experience as a family doctor and the lessons he's learned from patients, research, students, and general practice "giants," who made astute observations that formed the foundations of family medicine.

Like many of us who have practised for a few years, Livingston enjoys the history of medicine and shares with us compelling stories of such eminent family medicine researchers as Edward Jenner and William Pickles. He brings history closer to home by highlighting Canadian contributors to family medicine, such as Mary Percy Jackson, who were unknown to me.

The most compelling message of this book is held in its title, where Livingston reminds us of our greatest asset in understanding our patients: our ability to listen. Here he is referring to the kind of deep listening that happens over extended relationships with our patients, their families, and our communities.

Like much of family medicine, this book has immediate appeal. Livingston humbly tells wonderful stories about his patients and about what he learned from them. Also like family medicine, the book has after-effects, which take time to reveal themselves. There were times in the latter part of the book when I thought

I had lost track of his theme and felt subject to rhetoric about whiplash research, alternative medicine, and teaching students in the community. The book seemed fragmented; however, I kept on reading. Then I discovered how these seemingly disparate chapters or parts fit into the whole.

There are excellent examples throughout the book of how family doctors have contributed to our understanding of people. What I read affirmed a perspective I share with the author about listening and brought to light a few Canadian physicians who, although not well known, have contributed much to our discipline.

Read it. You'll enjoy it, and it will provide you with ample material to share with your students on the history and principles of family medicine.

—Cheri Bethune MD MCISc CCFP FCFP

Dr Bethune is a Professor of Family Medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland in St John's.

Bloodletting and miraculous cures

AUTHOR Vincent Lam
PUBLISHER Random House of Canada Ltd, 2775 Matheson Blvd E, Mississauga, ON L4W 4P7;
TELEPHONE 905 624-0672; **FAX** 905 624-6217;
WEBSITE www.randomhouse.ca
PUBLISHED 2006/pp 368/\$29.95

OVERALL RATING Excellent

STRENGTHS Well-written and gripping collection of medical fiction; a page-turner that takes you from student days to medical evacuations to severe acute respiratory syndrome

WEAKNESSES No cohesive theme to bind the stories; some chapters leave readers unsatisfied

AUDIENCE A medical and general literary audience

Humanity in healthcare: the heart and soul of medicine

AUTHOR Peter Barritt

PUBLISHER Radcliffe Publishing Ltd, 18 Marcham Rd, Abingdon, OXON, OX14 1AA, United Kingdom;

TELEPHONE 44 (0)1235 528820;

FAX 44 (0)1235 528830;

WEBSITE www.radcliffe-oxford.com

PUBLISHED 2005/pp 272/\$55.00 US

OVERALL RATING Fair

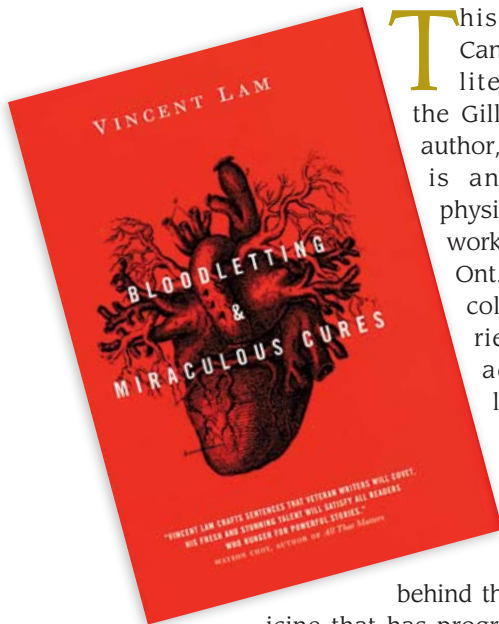
STRENGTHS Provides an overview of the humanities and could stimulate conversation, enthusiasm, and ideas; some chapters well developed

WEAKNESSES Superficially written, verbose, stilted; biased

AUDIENCE Health professionals

Peter Barritt's intent is to show how disciplines outside medical science can enrich the daily experience of those within it. His aim is to provide an overview of the humanities: "to stimulate conversation, enthusiasm and ideas." As such, the book succeeds. Peter's amalgamation of inspirational quotes, poetry, and scientific writing—a "thinker salad"—is bridged together with his own writing, organized into 15 chapters and 3 parts: Health and humanities, Suffering, and Healing. His intended audience is health professionals.

Peter quotes numerous sources, with a detailed bibliography at the end of each chapter to promote further reading. Some chapters are well developed; for example, chapter 13, Compassion, portrays personal empathy and deep understanding. Most chapters, however, are superficially written, verbose, and stilted. Peter's personal political and religious biases frequently emerge, unjustified, seemingly out of nowhere, leaving the reader quite baffled. In addition, Peter unabashedly juxtaposes his own poetry (not cited or previously published elsewhere) alongside John Donne, Rainer Maria Rilke, Henri Nouwen, and Dalai Lama. This book would be more



This book won Canada's premier literary award, the Giller Prize. The author, Vincent Lam, is an emergency physician currently working in Toronto, Ont. His book is a collection of stories with characters whose lives crisscross over time.

The title suggests readers will be able to peek

behind the veil of medicine that has progressed beyond

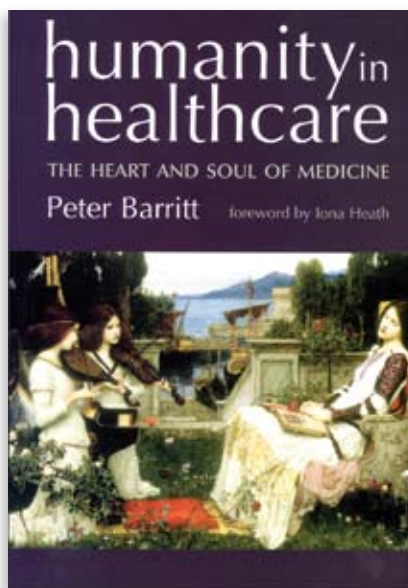
bloodletting and miraculous cures. The book discusses the thoughts and worries of people involved in medicine as they progress from premed to medical school to practice, but it does not provide insight into their trials and tribulations. These stories are about moral dilemmas, heartbreak, and devastation.

Lam can accelerate a story to a heart-pounding blur of events and slow it down to reveal the intimate details of an everyday medical event. He does this by bringing readers into the minds of the characters as they deal with these events. One of the best stories unwinds from a dawdling and distracted beginning with a pregnant woman in early labour. Lam introduces agonizing problems in quick succession. From cell phone conversations, the reader learns that the woman's husband is in another city, and a snowstorm is hindering travel. Anesthesia is unavailable as the fetal heart rate drops. Readers will not put the book down until the story careens to the end.

Some events and characters are contemptible and unethical, which was unsettling. I was frustrated by a lack of a cohesive or redemptive theme, by the unsatisfying conclusions of some stories, and by certain dark story lines. Yet, Lam's writing is so compelling and challenging that I strongly recommend this award-winning book. Just be prepared to be shocked.

—Michael Lock MD CCFP FRCPC

Dr Lock is Medical Director of the Department of Radiation Oncology and Head of the Division of Radiation Oncology at the University of Western Ontario in London.



credible had each chapter received prior publication as a stand-alone, thoroughly developed, and carefully edited essay.

There is increasing recognition that medical schools and residency programs should incorporate teaching on the humanities.¹ Available publications abound in this emerging field. The Arts, Literature and Medicine Database² is a vast resource. Miriam Divinsky³ read extensively on narrative and the humanities in medicine, and her bibliography will soon be accessible on the College of Family Physicians of Canada website. Peter Barritt's book provides a limited contribution to the field. For example, I could see his book shaping the outline for a humanity and health care curriculum: a 15-week seminar series, with 1 chapter each week—suffering and spirituality, dances of death, and so on. Many of us would have welcomed such a course when we were medical students.

—Ruth Elwood Martin MD FCFP

Dr Martin is a Clinical Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Acknowledgment

"Thinker salad" is a term that was coined by members of my book group, who read and discussed *Humanity in Healthcare* to facilitate writing this review.

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Beyond the Hippocratic oath. A memoir on the rise of modern medical ethics

AUTHOR John B. Dossetor

PUBLISHER University of Alberta Press, Ring House 2, Edmonton, AB T6G 2E1;

TELEPHONE 780 492-3662;

FAX 780 492-0719; **WEBSITE** www.uap.ualberta.ca

PUBLISHED 2005/320 pp/\$39.95

OVERALL RATING Fair

STRENGTHS Increases awareness of many ethical issues; reflects on an interesting professional career

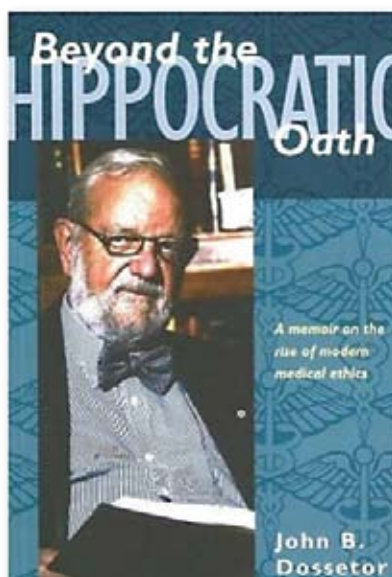
WEAKNESSES Broad in scope—neither narrative nor autobiography

AUDIENCE Health care professionals, especially those with interest in medical ethics

Dr John Dossetor has certainly had a distinguished and varied career. From working in nephrology when it was a budding specialty to program development, transplant medicine, extensive clinical research, and, in his latter years, a turn into medical ethics, this polymath is now able to pen his memoirs with an impressive breadth and scope.

He begins with what is essentially his professional autobiography, from his early training in the United Kingdom and the formative experiences that captured

his interest and guided much of his career. Moving to Montreal, Que, after some international travel, and subsequently to the University of Alberta in Edmonton, he describes many of his experiences and chronicles the development of a rapidly changing area of medicine and research. Dr Dossetor examines these times and experiences



Book Reviews

through the lens of an ethicist, presenting problems and dilemmas along the way, and finishing with some thoughts on ethical issues themselves.

Unfortunately, this has its limitations. Ethics by its very nature is more given to questions than answers, and this is where the memoir has its difficulties. It neither fully explores the issues nor is able to sustain a continuous narrative, and at times becomes sidetracked with reading lists, sidebar discussions, or other somewhat tangential items.

This book chronicles a fascinating career as well as the impressive development in an area of medicine. The issues raised by these and other scientific advances spur the ethical questions that Dr Dossetor raises. Though well written, it is difficult to do justice to all this at once. Nonetheless, the book will be appreciated by those with a special interest in medical ethics or a humanist ethical perspective.

—Norm Kienitz MD CCFP(EM)

Dr Kienitz *practises emergency medicine in Sydney, NS, and is a lecturer at Dalhousie Univeristy in Halifax.*

