



What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine

Danielle Ofri

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A look at the emotional side of medicine—the shame, fear, anger, anxiety, empathy, and even love that affect patient care

Physicians are assumed to be objective, rational beings, easily able to detach as they guide patients and families through some of life's most challenging moments. But doctors' emotional responses to the life-and-death dramas of everyday practice have a profound impact on medical care. And while much has been written about the minds and methods of the medical professionals who save our lives, precious little has been said about their emotions. In *What Doctors Feel*, Dr. Danielle Ofri has taken on the task of dissecting the hidden emotional responses of doctors, and how these directly influence patients.

How do the stresses of medical life—from paperwork to grueling hours to lawsuits to facing death—affect the medical care that doctors can offer their patients? Digging deep into the lives of doctors, Ofri examines the daunting range of emotions—shame, anger, empathy, frustration, hope, pride, occasionally despair, and sometimes even love—that permeate the contemporary doctor-patient connection. Drawing on scientific studies, including some surprising research, Dr. Danielle Ofri offers up an unflinching look at the impact of emotions on health care.

With her renowned eye for dramatic detail, Dr. Ofri takes us into the swirling heart of patient care, telling stories of caregivers caught up and occasionally torn down by the whirlwind life of doctoring. She admits to the humiliation of an error that nearly killed one of her patients and her forever fear of making another. She mourns when a beloved patient is denied a heart transplant. She tells the riveting stories of an intern traumatized when she is forced to let a newborn die in her arms, and of a doctor whose daily glass of wine to handle the frustrations of the ER escalates into a destructive addiction. But doctors don't only feel fear, grief, and frustration. Ofri also reveals that doctors tell bad jokes about "toxic sock syndrome," cope through gallows humor, find hope in impossible situations, and surrender to ecstatic happiness when they triumph over illness. The stories here reveal the undeniable truth that emotions have a distinct effect on how doctors care for their patients. For both clinicians and patients, understanding what doctors feel can make all the difference in giving and getting the best medical care.

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