

family. This should be an impossible mission on its own, let alone when combined with the demands of marriage and a young family. Dr. Au summarizes this point beautifully when she states, “I now have two full-time jobs—residency and parenthood—each of which demand my complete attention, almost all of my waking hours, and both of which society has drilled into me are my first, most important priorities. The stakes are huge. [Halfway] efforts at either would be unacceptable.” It is good to know that I’m not alone.

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Healer: A Novel. By Carol Cassella, M.D. New York, Simon and Schuster, 2010. Pages: 320. Price: \$15.00.

Healer, written by Carol Cassella, M.D., is a novel about a family’s financial rise and fall and their subsequent interactions with unlikely heroes. This is the second book for Dr. Cassella, the first being the critically acclaimed *Oxygen*, which won rave reviews among anesthesiologists for its anesthesiology-based plot. *Healer* is another enjoyable read by Dr. Cassella.

Addison Boehning is a rising star in the pharmaceutical industry. His discovery of a potentially life-saving drug has catapulted Addison to a position of wealth and prestige. His wife, Claire, and their 14-yr-old daughter, Jory, grow accustomed to living as if there is a never-ending supply of money to fund their wide variety of activities. As Addison’s drug undergoes clinical trials, complications arise that send the Boehning family spiraling into financial ruin. They sell their spacious, upscale home in Seattle and move to their small, rundown vacation home in rural Hallum. The move is devastating to Jory, who has left her friends, her ballet lessons, and all that encompassed her privileged teenage life. As she learns that the move is not as temporary as she had hoped, she revels in her anger and finds solace only in her limited time with her father. Addison puts all of his time and energy into securing an investor that can help move the clinical trials of his drug forward. He is a risk-taker by nature, which has been a source of both intrigue and frustration for Claire. He attends various medical conferences and meetings, gambling their minimal funds wining and dining potential investors. Claire realizes that she will need to find a job to help bridge the financial gap. Having left the field of medicine during her residency to care for Jory as a baby, she knows that her résumé is less than stellar. She finds work in the local public health clinic where most of the patients are immigrants struggling to make ends meet. The only physician at the clinic is Dan Zelaya, who decides to overlook the gaps on Claire’s résumé and hire her. Dan becomes more than Claire’s boss;

he is her mentor and friend. They develop a relationship of mutual trust and dependence. Claire also befriends a local immigrant woman named Miguela. Miguela is a hard-working, intelligent woman on a quest to learn the truth about her family. As their lives intersect, Claire and Miguela learn about fate, friendship, and the power of healing. It is through the clinic that a potential investor for Addison’s drug emerges and Addison and Claire are thrust into an emotional battle of ethics. It seems that they were destined for the possible solutions before them, but before they can press forward, they must put all of the pieces together.

Healer is written for a wide audience. With or without a medical background, readers can relate to the multiple story lines woven within the pages. The friction between Addison and Claire in handling their financial and emotional situation, the emotion generated by Miguela’s past, and the compassion shown at the public health clinic by Dan and the staff are all important elements of this novel. *Healer* is written in a manner that will make the reader take personal inventory of his or her own ethics and values and will provoke thought about the way each character reflects and challenges another. The power of money is intense, but the benefits of healing are many.

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Cutting for Stone. By Abraham Verghese, M.D., M.A.C.P. New York, Vintage Books, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0-375-71436-8, ISBN-10: 0375714367. Pages: 688. Price: \$15.95.

Cutting for Stone is a novel written from the first-person perspective of Marion Stone, one of the identical twins born of a secret affair between a beautiful Indian nun and a British surgeon. A series of catastrophic events occur during their births, leading to their father’s abandonment and life-altering changes to the staff of Missing Hospital. Set in Ethiopia beginning in the 1950s, the story chronicles the twins as they grow up amid the perils of a volatile country on the verge of revolution.

The “true” meaning behind the title *Cutting for Stone* is debatable. A simple explanation is that the main characters have the last name Stone and are practicing surgeons of varying degree. Looking deeper, *Cutting for Stone* is an excerpt from a passage of the Hippocratic Oath, which all physicians recite either directly or through modernized versions during their respective commencements. The direct passage mentioned in the novel, “I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifested. I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art.” The original passage refers to the practice of lithotomy, or “cutting for the stone,” which appears in records from the ancient

Greeks, Chinese, Persians, and Egyptians. Verghese, an internist and professor at Stanford University School of Medicine, has been quoted previously as saying he renews his vows to medicine every year at commencement, to “swear by Apollo and Hygieia and Panacea to be true to her, for she is the source of all ... I shall not cut for stone.”

Most of the story takes place at Missing Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Verghese finds the delicate balance between sufficiently describing medical procedures and terminology while offering ample explanations to foster the reading enjoyment of medical professionals and nonprofessionals. For a medical professional, it is both interesting and informative as the author describes the hospital’s internist’s (Ghosh) classic examination findings, such as “the head bobbing in tune with the pulse” of aortic regurgitation and “the high pitched notes, like water dripping on a zinc plate” of a volvulus. Ghosh even constructs for Marion a homemade Corrigan water hammer to illustrate the pulsatile findings of aortic regurgitation. (Ghosh resembles Verghese in this regard because the author is renowned for demonstrating the wealth of knowledge and information that can be gleaned from physical examination of a patient.)

Verghese’s writing style throughout the book is graceful, detailed, and engrossing. He skillfully incorporates medicine into the novel without letting it overtake the narrative, instead making it a complementary part of the story and crucial to the development of each character. Each character’s development is affected by events throughout the story. In addition, all the characters have personal flaws that make them more believable and lovable. For instance, Shiva, the other identical twin, is a one-dimensional character throughout the book—a savant in certain aspects, such as rote memorization, math, and dancing. However, he is socially awkward and inept, with an inability to understand the consequences of his actions toward other characters. Marion is the outgoing, outspoken twin, who is more in tune with others’ thoughts, but his work-comes-first tendencies permit life’s pleasures to pass him by. Despite their different personalities, the twins have in common a passion for medicine. Clearly, medical professionals aren’t all alike.

Verghese draws on his own experiences to help the reader understand the Ethiopian culture and surroundings by eloquently describing the country’s social unrest, class divisions, customs, traditions, and daily lifestyle. Historical figures, such as Emperor Haile Selassie, dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, and coup leaders, were real figures actively involved in the Ethiopian revolution. Their actions weigh heavily on each character as the book progresses.

The story line moves at a steady pace, and characters are seamlessly transitioned into the story without interrupting the overall flow of the novel. Likewise, the author blends seemingly benign daily events, such as the twins and their family playing bridge with friends, into crucial turning points in the story.

This book is a must-read. It has all of the plot twists a reader expects in a well-written novel and will hold one’s

attention regardless of one’s interest in medicine. The story flows naturally, a tribute to human nature’s triumph over hardships. You will not want to put this book down.

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The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things

Right. By Atul Gawande, M.D., M.P.H. New York, Metropolitan Books, 2011. Pages: 240. Price: \$15.00.

We healthcare providers are not the primary audience for *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right*. Arguably, the concepts discussed are a good fit for the medical profession, but the definition of a manifesto includes the concept of a public declaration of policy and aims. Dr. Gawande’s popular nonfiction books about medicine and surgery educate the masses about us and what we do right or wrong, good or bad; this book is no exception.

Wearing his nonfiction book author and *New Yorker* staff writer hats, Dr. Gawande has produced a work with a premise that has the appeal of apple pie and motherhood. What patient or healthcare provider doesn’t want to get things done right in the delivery of health care? In the first chapter, The Problem of Extreme Complexity, Dr. Gawande introduces a challenge that resonates with all healthcare providers. He lays the groundwork for the rationale for checklist use in any complex endeavor, whether banking, building skyscrapers, churning out large numbers of complex gourmet dishes in a restaurant, flying aircraft, or operating on patients. To the chagrin of all healthcare providers, failures have remained an all-too-frequent occurrence despite our healthcare educational system having produced providers with exceptional expertise in all disciplines. According to Dr. Gawande, “the volume and complexity of what we know has exceeded our individual ability to deliver its benefits correctly, safely, or reliably.” Medical checklists offer an alternative, nontraditional strategy to overcome the failures of the healthcare system and to reduce the consequent complications and avoidable deaths. Dr. Gawande points out that although checklists augment memory and attention, they cannot replace mastery of a profession or practice experience.

In chapter 2, The Checklist, Dr. Gawande reviews how checklists saved the life of the Boeing Corporation, its B-17 Flying Fortress, and the B-17’s future flight crews. The prototype of the B-17 crashed shortly after taking off on its test flight. Crash analysis revealed that a minor error had doomed the flight, and that the airplane was simply too complex for one person to fly. The crew checklist developed for flying the B-17 simplified the preflight check of the B-17, permitting the fleet of B-17s to fly the next 1.8 million miles without an accident. Used in this manner, the checklist acts as a forcing function (an engineering term) that forces necessary behavior.