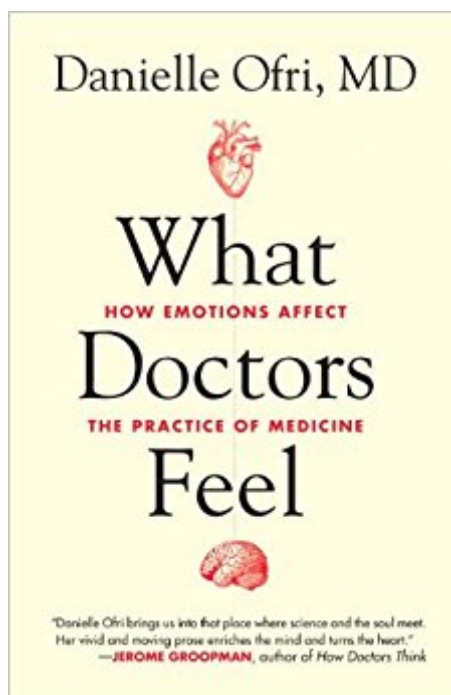


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# What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect The Practice Of Medicine



## Synopsis

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 —œtoxic 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. — — —

## Book Information

Paperback: 232 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press; 1 edition (May 6, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807033308

ISBN-13: 978-0807033302

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 124 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #41,471 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Special Topics > Essays #10 in Books > Medical Books > Administration & Medicine Economics > Practice Management & Reimbursement #10 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Administration & Policy > Practice Management & Reimbursement

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Tucked inside a white lab coat or scrub suit is a welter of human emotions that can play a large role in a doctor's decision-making process. Ofri, an internist at New York's Bellevue Hospital, explores the emotional core of doctoring. Suturing together her own experiences, the plights of memorable patients, and interviews with other physicians, she examines the diverse feelings—anger, grief, shame, disillusionment, gratitude, humility, joy—that can fluster or elevate physicians. "Fear is a primal emotion in medicine," she writes, and doctors worry about making a mistake or even killing a patient. Sadness is an occupational hazard, and "A thread of sorrow weaves through the daily life of medicine." Then there's empathy. Is it innate, acquired, or both, and why do third-year medical students lose it? Ofri exposes her emotional side as she recounts the story of a longtime patient, an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala who finally receives a heart transplant but dies shortly after the procedure. Ofri admits, "Doctors who are angry, nervous, jealous, burned out, terrified, or ashamed can usually still treat bronchitis or ankle sprains competently." Yet her insightful and invigorating book makes the case that it's better for patients if a physician's emotional compass-needle points in a positive direction. --Tony Miksanek --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Taut, vivid prose. . . . She writes for a lay audience with a practiced hand." "New York Times" Here is a book that is at once sad and joyful, frightening and thought-provoking. In her lucid and passionate explanations of the important role that emotions play in the practice of medicine and in healing and health, Danielle Ofri tells stories of great importance to both doctors and patients. "Perri Klass, author of *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor* An invaluable guide for doctors and patients on how to recognize and navigate the emotional

subtexts<sup>™</sup> of the doctor-patient relationship. • • "Kirkus Reviews" "Yet her insightful and invigorating book makes the case that it<sup>™</sup>s better for patients if a physician<sup>™</sup>s emotional compass-needle points in a positive direction. • • "Booklist" (starred review) "Rich and deeply insightful. . . . A fascinating journey into the heart and mind of a physician struggling to do the best for her patients while navigating an imperfect health care system. • • "Boston Globe" "With grace, courage, humility, and compassion, Bellevue Hospital physician Ofri <sup>^</sup> gives voice and color to the heartbreak, stress, and joy that attends medical practice. • • "Library Journal" "A fabulous read. • • "Greater Good" "Dr. Ofri's book is essential reading in Medical Humanities." She traces her own experiences with patients from all backgrounds, and uses clinical vignettes to confess her own feelings--disgust, fear, shame, gratitude, joy. She weaves together personal anecdotes and medical learning in a compelling account of her medical decisions and reflections. Highly recommended." • • "Sara van den Berg, Professor of English and Medical Humanities, Saint Louis University" "I have been a family physician for almost 50 years, and despite all those years of medicine, I was in tears about half the time while I read *What Doctors Feel*. I have recommended that every AHMA member read it." • • "Bill Manahan, Executive Director at Minnesota Holistic Medicine Group" "Dr. Ofri's anecdotal writing style makes this book a perfect accompaniment for the academic setting. Her real-life experiences can be incorporated into a variety of health science curricula bringing course theory together with practical application. As a result, her readers critical gain insight regarding why applying theory in the practice of medicine requires empathy for the physicians and proactive cooperation amongst colleagues." • • "Christine Whittrock, Associate Professor of Instruction in Regulatory Affairs, Temple University" "I describe patients to my students and ask them to role play either the doctor or the patient. I see a difference in their responses after they have read *What Doctors Feel*. They are more studied in their answers. Part of medical education now is not only core competencies from a factual standpoint but also a social standpoint. Dr. Ofri has a way of communicating those lessons in a clear a cogent and very personal fashion." • • "Beth Dollinger M.D. Arnot Ogden Medical Center" "What Doctors Feel is the perfect book for my research and teaching on the subject of lack of empathy in medical school students. • • "James Asa Shield, Jr., MD, Professor, Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, Virginia Commonwealth University" "I certainly know your work" "in fact, not only do I have copies of each of your books, but I often use your writing in my teaching at UNM medical school. I teach communication skills, ethics/professionalism, narrative medicine, and wellness, all under my role as Director of Physician and Student Wellness at the School of Medicine. I think the piece of yours I last used was <sup>^</sup>When Doctors Listen<sup>™</sup> from the New York Times, and I just assigned *What*

Doctors Feel in a course related to the Healer's Art curriculum. • Liz Lawrence, MD, FACP, Director, Physician and Student Wellness, Associate Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, UNM School of Medicine

I needed this book. After finishing a surgery clerkship, I was at the lowest place I had been all year. A friend told me at the beginning of the rotation to keep a copy of my personal statement in my pocket, because at times, I would forget why I had chosen to enter medicine. I didn't take his advice, but recognize now that I did become that detached and disillusioned. Thankfully, the combination of a family medicine rotation and having this book to read when patients "would rather not see a medical student" has served the same purpose - if anything, I understand better than ever why I am doing this. I chose to pursue medicine after realizing that I needed more emotional attachment to the people, and the cause, that I wanted to work for. We talk a lot about 'hidden curriculum' in medical school, but I'd take it a step further and say your book discusses the 'neglected curriculum' of medical school. I'm almost done with my first year on the wards now, and am familiar enough with patient care to identify with all the 'feelings' assigned as chapter titles. Countless times, I've wondered how residents and attendings deal with difficult patient deaths, the joy of successful treatment, medical errors, the reprimanding that takes place during M&M, litigation, etc. All we have to learn from are the behaviors our supervisors respond to these situations with, and so much is left unspoken on account of being 'resilient.' I can't thank Dr. Ofri enough for her willingness to be vulnerable and brutally honest. I greatly appreciated the work she did to present different perspectives on each emotion, with many of the stories not having classic 'happy endings.' An appeal of medicine is to work in an environment that challenges you at your emotional, ethical, and philosophical core, as much as it does intellectually. But while so much time is spent developing our intellect amidst emotional challenges, you're essentially left on your own to process experiences and develop coping skills. While there are attempts to create a space for reflection in a 'doctoring' course, discussions among peers are limited in value compared to hearing from the professionals we aspire to become. This book provides invaluable insight to students.

affecting and informative book on the mental struggles of doctors - presented thru stories of the experiences of actual doctors as well as the author's own - often gripping - and touching - the book is a journey that everyone who expects to visit a doctor at least once in their lifetime should make - via this book or a similar one this will have you thinking about social issues as well - the author doesn't offer advice - but she points out that doctors now spend only a small part of their day with

patients - the rest with paperwork - and that the US population of doctors is shrinking - while the population as a whole is growing

This book deepened my understanding of doctors as human beings who happen to be tasked with making life and death decisions all day, every single day. Each of us can recount bad experiences with doctors, but this book was excellent in exposing underlying factors contributing to those experiences. *How Doctors Feel* is definitely worth reading especially for patients and caregivers. I came away with greater empathy for the "people" practicing the profession.

This excellent book brought back many, many memories from my medical training, and is a touchstone for many of the feelings I have even today, after over 35 years of medical practice. The book amply illustrates the gamut of emotions that doctors feel; fear of making a mistake, feelings of inadequacy, anguish, loss, false confidence, etc. Most of these feelings will come as no surprise to those that practice medicine, but will be an eye-opener to patients and those out of the field of medical practice. The book may help physicians come to terms with some of their emotions, especially the feelings of isolation they sometimes feel, and will certainly help patients understand the intense stress and emotional turmoil that their own physicians sometimes feel.

As a patient with a chronic illness who has seen a large number of doctors, I can only wish this book (or Jerome Groopman's work) were required reading. My own illness was the direct result of a surgeon's error. The surgeon's ego led to compounding the problem. Dr. Ofri is correct when she says apologies go a long way toward healing. She correctly states doctors need to spend more time with their patients (& she does this despite what is surely a high volume general practice). I find a lot of parallels in what is written about fear of judgement in medicine & my own profession. I can also state that my doctors who talk to me & lay out my options are doctors I'm more willing to return to, & try to work with. Judgement goes both ways, and I'm often judged by my doctors. I also experience the unwillingness to take on patients who are difficult. I'm a risk, and my doctors are afraid I'm going to sue. Doctors also defend each other; they don't want to hear that one of their fellows did anything like THIS. So, read this if you want to know why your doctors treat you the way they do, and doctors read this so you can understand why patients need you to listen.

Dr. Danielle Ofri offers a heart wrenching honesty of the occupational lives and characters of physicians, focusing upon the exercise of empathy with their patients. Telling the story of lessons

learned, through a process of her personal experiences as a physician, she provides insight and understanding into this unique culture of healers. It is a great read.

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