

## Book Review: *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine* by Danielle Ofri

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I started to read this book with trepidation: Was it a tell-all memoir by one of our own on the practice of medicine? Would it bring back unwanted memories from my internship in a county hospital? Or would she show the public the intricate mechanics of hospital and clinic life—the good, the bad, and the ugly?

Danielle Ofri accomplished all of this with great alacrity. I was riveted from the first chapter, which began with the journey of Ofri as a new clerk exposed to her first patient, a homeless woman who presents to the rape crisis center. Those of us who have trained and worked in safety net hospitals know this patient well. Although the awfulness of the situation demands our medical expertise, our olfactory and chemoreceptor trigger zones collide against us, inducing a physical sense of revulsion that is at first very hard to overcome in order to examine the patient. The physician must summon from deep within the professionalism that this patient de-

mands. The simple act of the medical aide demonstrating both humanity and empathy will strike a resounding chord among many of us who had to learn to overcome our revulsion the first time we were faced with a patient with a horrific physical appearance.

Physicians, particularly internists, will identify with the adeptness with which she has woven the story of her young heart failure patient, Julia. We experience the trials and tribulations of taking care of the undocumented sweet patient, who is similar in age to the author; the hours of patient advocacy; and the fine tuning of medications until there is no more that can be done. Ofri tells the all-too-familiar story well.

Perhaps the best part of the book for physicians is the honesty with which Ofri recounts the stories of her patients, the medical errors, and the toll that a career in medicine can take on an individual. I was forced to relive several similar stories and ethical dilemmas. The experience was almost cathartic. I felt an

overwhelming sense of relief that a physician-author had addressed the white elephant in room—the roller-coaster of emotions that makes us who we are. Whether we like it or not, our practice of medicine is indeed colored by our feelings. As a profession, we tend to avoid all emotions unless we are celebrating our medical successes. Ofri warns of severe fatigue leading to complete supra-tentorial shut down—a phenomenon most of us have experienced. Ofri reminds us that we should indeed be looking out for our trainees and colleagues.

I finished the book with a sense of fulfillment. While the book did force me to recall some “unwanted memories,” I felt a sense of validation. Here was someone of my ilk reminding me that it is okay to feel anger, joy, shame, relief, and peace. Accepting the emotional side of medicine makes me a better doctor, ready to undertake population-based health, HCAPHS, and other quality measures.