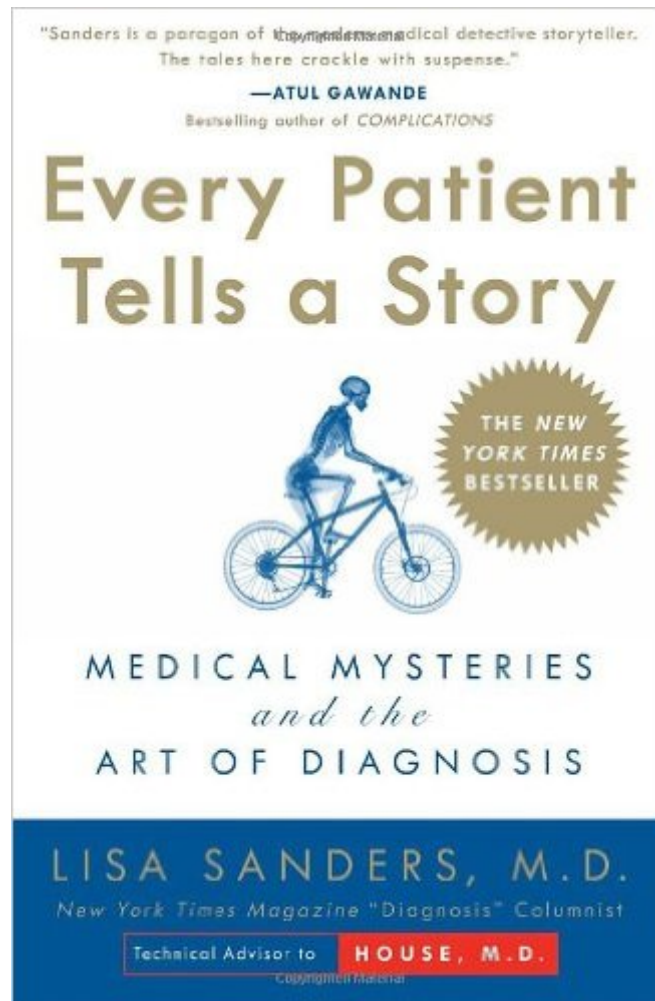


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Every Patient Tells A Story: Medical Mysteries And The Art Of Diagnosis



Synopsis

A riveting exploration of the most difficult and important part of what doctors do, by Yale School of Medicine physician Dr. Lisa Sanders, author of the monthly New York Times Magazine column "Diagnosis," the inspiration for the hit Fox TV series House, M.D. "The experience of being ill can be like waking up in a foreign country. Life, as you formerly knew it, is on hold while you travel through this other world as unknown as it is unexpected. When I see patients in the hospital or in my office who are suddenly, surprisingly ill, what they really want to know is, "What is wrong with me?" They want a road map that will help them manage their new surroundings. The ability to give this unnerving and unfamiliar place a name, to know it "on some level" restores a measure of control, independent of whether or not that diagnosis comes attached to a cure. Because, even today, a diagnosis is frequently all a good doctor has to offer." A healthy young man suddenly loses his memory "making him unable to remember the events of each passing hour. Two patients diagnosed with Lyme disease improve after antibiotic treatment "only to have their symptoms mysteriously return. A young woman lies dying in the ICU "bleeding, jaundiced, incoherent" and none of her doctors know what is killing her. In *Every Patient Tells a Story*, Dr. Lisa Sanders takes us bedside to witness the process of solving these and other diagnostic dilemmas, providing a firsthand account of the expertise and intuition that lead a doctor to make the right diagnosis. Never in human history have doctors had the knowledge, the tools, and the skills that they have today to diagnose illness and disease. And yet mistakes are made, diagnoses missed, symptoms or tests misunderstood. In this high-tech world of modern medicine, Sanders shows us that knowledge, while essential, is not sufficient to unravel the complexities of illness. She presents an unflinching look inside the detective story that marks nearly every illness "the diagnosis" revealing the combination of uncertainty and intrigue that doctors face when confronting patients who are sick or dying. Through dramatic stories of patients with baffling symptoms, Sanders portrays the absolute necessity and surprising difficulties of getting the patient's story, the challenges of the physical exam, the pitfalls of doctor-to-doctor communication, the vagaries of tests, and the near calamity of diagnostic errors. In *Every Patient Tells a Story*, Dr. Sanders chronicles the real-life drama of doctors solving these difficult medical mysteries that not only illustrate the art and science of diagnosis, but often save the patients' lives. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

From the blurbs on the book I expected this to be for Internal Medicine what the series of books by the late Dr. Harold Klawans was for Neurology, a set of stories about clinical puzzles and their resolution. The publisher sells this book short, because while these vignettes are present (albeit in briefer form than in Klawans books), there is so much more! This book is really a grand tour of the role of the physical exam in medicine, through all its stages. You'll learn how doctors are taught the process, its declining role in current practice as hi-tech tests replace doctors looking, listening, and touching. You'll find out why tests can't completely replace a skilled doctor conducting a careful exam, the pressures on doctors to skimp or omit the exam, even the role technology can play in helping doctors evaluate alternative approaches. All accompanied by illustrative stories to pique your interest. This book may be a disappointment to those led by the title and blurbs on the covers to expect a book just about diagnostic stories, something akin to a compendium of the monthly "Vital Signs" column in Discover magazine. For those concerned about health care issues, though, it provides a thorough background into an area of medicine and insight into the debate over the growing use of expensive tests. The worrisome aspect of this book comes because once you understand the importance of a careful exam, you realize that not only is it being abandoned wholesale by the profession even when it should be retained, you have no way to know whether your doctor is any good at it. One positive sign related in this book is the renewed interest among medical faculty of the importance of careful physical exams. Doctors must now show proficiency in order to be licensed.

I wish I had liked this book more. I wanted to like the book more. The author writes in an engaging and accessible voice about the practice of medicine. I generally enjoy books along these lines, especially the well-written ones, which this is. The premise of this particular book is appealing: the

stories of how doctors diagnose difficult cases. The subtitle promises that the book is full of medical mysteries, and indeed, the stories in the book about people with strange collections of symptoms whose illnesses proved very hard to figure out are as compelling as I expected. The problem is that these stories are not quite what the book is about. It's as if the author started to write a book about medical mysteries and then got sidetracked. The digressions are about interesting and important issues (why the physical exam is something of a lost art and what this might mean for the practice of medicine, for example). However, they don't fit into the book as it's designed and as it presents itself. It's as if you went to see what you expected to be a romantic comedy film and found yourself faced with something that started out sort of like "When Harry Met Sally", where the middle portion of the movie was more like "Midnight Express", with a few scenes pulled from "The Sound of Music", and then the ending of Harry and Sally, followed by a fragment from a lecture on Plato. It's not that all the parts aren't worthy themselves. It's that they by no means make a coherent narrative. Worse, imagine that the director, writer, and actors in the mish-mosh movie insisted that it was simply a romantic comedy. That the detective stories are the best parts of the book makes it worse, in some ways.

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