

Time to Care by Robin Youngson

Robin Page

School of Medicine, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland

Robin is a third year medical student at the University of Auckland with a keen interest in Rural Health and Medical Education. In his spare time he likes writing and sitting on top of mountains, sometimes doing both at the same time.

"Put your head down, complete your tasks as quickly as possible, get the paperwork done, and move onto the next patient." This is a familiar scenario to many. These are the unspoken rules we learn to live by when stretched to our maximum.

Time to Care is the manifesto of healthcare workers striving for something more in a system that rewards numbers more than it does compassion. The book opens with some sobering statistics: a 2008 survey of 12,000 physicians in the USA found that 78% found medicine "less or no longer rewarding," 60% would not recommend medicine as a career, and that 49% planned to either reduce their patient numbers or stop practicing in the next 3 years¹, a crippling blow at a time when healthcare is more stretched than ever.

The author, Dr Robin Youngson, aims to address this and other prominent issues in healthcare ranging from physician burnout to building patient-focused systems. How? By following the principle that compassion comes before everything else.

In the pages that follow, Youngson compiles and presents the evidence that bringing the care back into healthcare benefits both practitioners and patients alike. Weaving patient stories with his own personal experiences as an anaesthetist, Youngson describes his journey on both sides of the fence we place between ourselves and our patients. From waiting room to boardroom, no perspective is left uncovered.

He recalls how powerless he felt when his own daughter was admitted to hospital following a serious car crash, but also celebrates how the little things made all the difference in her care. After the crash, any jolt of the hospital bed would bring pain to her broken, bruised body. But during transfer one of her nurses would stop and lift each wheel of the bed individually over joints in the floor to ensure no jolting was felt in the bed. It is such a little thing, and completely unprompted, but it made all the difference and was an excellent demonstration of going above and beyond.

He talks candidly about a patient who, despite her many comorbidities and high risk of fatality during a major surgery, could see the fear he had about her anaesthesia and the risks it would involve. She took the time to allay his fears, the exact opposite of what we would expect from a Doctor-Patient relationship. As this patient said after surviving her surgery, "Robin, I prayed you would survive my anaesthetic and you did!"

Through humorous anecdotes, poignant prose and a thoroughly researched body of evidence to support his claims, Youngson makes a compelling argument for changing the way we practice. He addresses the paradox that taking time to care leads to lower workloads in the long run, and how it improves our relationships with patients, leading to better outcomes. Practical tips on developing compassion and managing

ourselves are seeded throughout, reminding the reader that sometimes, taking time to care for yourself is just as important as that directed towards those we care for. To quote, "I became a better doctor when I acknowledged my own human failings... when I judged myself harshly, I was also less kind to my patients". There is a lesson to be learnt from this, in that how we treat ourselves affects how we treat others.

Time to Care is a quintessential read for those about to embark on their clinical journey as much as it is for veterans of the medical system. I would even argue for making it part of the wellbeing curriculum at medical school, as the lessons contained have as much power in prevention as they do in cure of disenfranchised healthcare workers. We can all do with a little more care in our lives, not just for our patients but ourselves as practitioners. With that in mind, I believe everyone can find some tucked away in this book.

Conflict of Interest: None

References

Hawkins M. The physicians' perspective: medical practice in 2008: survey summary and analysis Boston, MA: The Physicians Foundation. Oct 2008.