

In Shock: My Journey From Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope

Review by Nichole Wang, DO, MPH and Nikita Joshi, MD

0196-0644/\$-see front matter

Copyright © 2018 by the American College of Emergency Physicians.

In Shock: My Journey From Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope*Awdish R**St. Martin's Press, 2017**272 pages, \$25.99**ISBN-13: 978-1250119216**ISBN-10: 1250119219*

“We aren’t trained to see our patients. We are trained to see pathology.... [T]he true relationship is forged between the doctor and the disease.... [T]he patients carrying the diagnosis are at risk of becoming an accessory to the whole affair, just another vector.” (p 26).

In Shock: My Journey From Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope by Dr. Rana Awdish is an engrossing memoir of a physician at the end of her critical care fellowship and also at the end of her first pregnancy. The reader follows her experiences as she goes through an Alice in Wonderland type of turbulent journey from becoming a patient who dies and is resuscitated at her own training hospital; to losing her baby; to going through horrifying events, health setbacks, and numerous emergency surgeries; and finally to becoming a critical care attending physician at the same hospital. Dr. Awdish develops deep introspection and periods of clear enlightenment of what it means to be a physician and a patient, and how the 2 collide in the intersection of the patient-physician relationship. And although this is a relationship those in the medical field are acutely attuned to, few have the insight of understanding it from the perspective of being both the physician and the patient. Dr. Awdish speaks to this dual role and catalogues her experience as a critically ill patient while describing the shared experience of human suffering from the physician and patient perspective.

The book is arranged into 12 chapters, each of which details her journey from near death to recovery. Her experiences and perspective as a patient are directly contrasted with her experiences as a physician. She candidly reflects on her views and practices as a physician before and after her experience as a critically ill patient. Through the chapters, Awdish reflects on pertinent issues within medicine today, including concepts such as shared decisionmaking, how the medical system responds to patients thought to be drug seeking, and the

dehumanization of the medical training system, among others. Her written narrative keeps the reader engaged and reflective as she weaves her stories with her perspectives.

In the first 4 chapters, she provides a harrowing narrative of her experience with death and her initial interactions with the health care system as a patient. One of her first interactions with the medical team is when she discovers through ultrasonography that the baby she’s carrying no longer has a heartbeat. As opposed to recognizing this tragic loss, the obstetrician intern struggling to perform the bedside ultrasonography requests her to show him what she sees on the screen for the purposes of his learning. This disconcerting and flabbergasting response from the obstetrician intern highlights the detachment of physicians from their patients. This detachment represents a failure in our medical training system to foster empathy and compassion among its trainees and hospital staff. She provides a firsthand account of the several instances throughout her journey as a patient in which her care as a patient was affected by the lack of empathy and the biases of the medical team. These experiences ultimately become the catalyst for the author and transform her perspective as an intensivist.

In chapters 5 through 8, Dr. Awdish provides an alarming description of the vulnerability and powerlessness that she experiences as a critically ill patient on a long path to recovery. She delves into the implicit and explicit bias of the medical system toward “drug seekers” and “difficult patients,” as well as the lack of shared decisionmaking that is pervasive in our medical system. This is particularly poignant when she describes her experiences with trying to control her pain because often she was disregarded as pain seeking, or having secondary gain, even in the midst of having surgical emergencies. Throughout her narrative, she highlights the profound effect that the lack of collaboration between physician and patient can have on patient care and outcomes.

In the last section of her book, she provides practical steps that both physicians and patients can take to improve the patient-physician relationship. These steps not only serve as a guide for physicians but also serve to empower the patient. She shares her experiences in conducting communication workshops and empathy-training sessions for the house staff at her hospital.

As physicians, truly listening and collaborating with our patients, being emotionally present, and

acknowledging the vast unknown of medicine can have a profound influence on the patient-physician relationship. By sharing her near-death experiences and complicated path to recovery, Dr. Awdish provides both patient and physician insight into the bias and flaws of the medical system, as well as practical steps to improve the relationship between provider and patient. Her instructions and advice can be incorporated into encounters with every patient we have, from the least ill to the most critically ill.

Nichole Wang, DO, MPH
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, CA

Nikita Joshi, MD
Highland Hospital
Alameda Health System
Oakland, CA

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annemergmed.2018.10.025>

Images in Emergency Medicine

The *Annals* Web site (www.annemergmed.com) contains a collection of hundreds of emergency medicine-related images, complete with brief discussion and diagnosis, in 18 categories. Go to the Images pull-down menu and test your diagnostic skill today. Below is a selection from the Toxicology Images.



“Spider Bite” by Suchard, July 2009, Volume 54, #1, pp. 8, 10.