



The Intern Blues: The Timeless Classic About the Making of a Doctor

Robert Marion

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While supervising a small group of interns at a major New York medical center, Dr. Robert Marion asked three of them to keep a careful diary over the course of a year. Andy, Mark, and Amy vividly describe their real-life lessons in treating very sick children; confronting child abuse and the awful human impact of the AIDS epidemic; skirting the indifference of the hospital bureaucracy; and overcoming their own fears, insecurities, and constant fatigue. Their stories are harrowing and often funny; their personal triumph is unforgettable.

This updated edition of *The Intern Blues* includes a new preface from the author discussing the status of medical training in America today and a new afterword updating the reader on the lives of the three young interns who first shared their stories with readers more than a decade ago.

The Intern Blues: The Timeless Classic About the Making of a Doctor Details

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Petra CigareX says

The title is incorrect. The diaries were written in 1985, over 30 years ago, and are very dated indeed. They are also for the most part boring. The three doctors, two male and one female, kept diaries for a year and the book reads like a transcription of them without any meaningful editing.

The uninteresting parts were the personal ones. They weren't very interesting people and they didn't have interesting partners or lives, just very ordinary. Social life has changed a great deal - there is no longer the pressure on women (at least the average American one not from a religion that considers sex before marriage a crime and restricts women's ability to earn a living according to what the men who 'own' her allow). Cell phones and social media aid communication in a way that couldn't be envisaged in the '80s. It was a different world back then.

The diaries were also very repetitious - too much work, not enough sleep, not eating properly, partner not being as sympathetic as they might be.

The interesting parts were the details of the very sick babies (all the doctors were in paediatrics) and children. The amount of work required to keep some babies alive was tremendous, a moment by moment monitoring, nursing care and treatment. And this is where the book really shows how dated it is. There are many more treatments and diagnostic tools now as well as accurate and continual electronic monitoring and reports.

All in all, it just wasn't interesting enough to recommend that anyone devote time to reading it when there are so many 5 star books out there.

Mbgirl says

Man, I devoured this book. Pediatric first year, learning and barely living in a hospital. Very educational, felt like I was in the trenches, living the harrowed, sleepless, bothered, and tense life of a first year. Scut university....attendings questioning away. Orders written and patients assessed all night long. All of these sorts of books have influenced me greatly, personally and professionally.

Laura says

Well, I finally finished reading this. It took some time, as it is a thick book and I've been pretty busy with school, but I got through it. I thought it was an interesting book and there was a lot I liked about it. From a medical standpoint it was fascinating to read about conditions I had never heard of before. I like how the author explained medical terms in bold; many of them I was already familiar with and the format made it easy for me to skip the explanation and pick the story back up. I liked reading about the different environments in which the interns worked, their feelings on dealing with sick and dying patients, and the effect their internship had on their personal relationships. I loved the sections written by "Mark" as he made

me laugh. I think it is crucial for a doctor to maintain a sense of humor, how else could they deal with all the tragedy that sometimes surrounds them?

There were a few things I wasn't crazy about, however. I think it would have been interesting to read about interns in other departments, not just pediatrics. If it covered a broader spectrum, each intern in a different department for example, one could see that the stress and hardship of interning is not found only in pediatrics. Maybe if one intern had been in the ER and another in geriatrics, or in regular ICU, I would have enjoyed the book more. Finally, "Amy" drove me crazy. There were times I was tempted to skip over her sections entirely. She complained constantly, always thinking she was being treated unfairly, always whining about not being able to spend time with her baby, always griping. I kept thinking, "this woman should not be a doctor!" When she complained that her co-workers were upset at her for trying to rush out the door every day, I felt sympathy towards them, not her. I thought she was selfish, self-centered, and bitchy. Definitely not a doctor I'd want! I wasn't surprised at all to read how she ended up, and think that was probably for the best.

Elin says

Again, reading this book makes me really happy not to be doing my internship or residency in the US. No way could I be on-call every 3rd night and then function normally! I mean really, you expect your doctor to be smart, educated and to make the right decisions - it's just that they haven't slept for 36 hours....

As far as I understand the 3 young doctors in this book finished their internships in the late 80's so I hope their experience is not the same as that of interns today!

Kels says

an extremely intimate and fascinating look at three interns' lives. You watch them go through ups and downs as they learn to view themselves as doctors, seeing all the cases they see along the way. The aspect I enjoyed, however, was a look at the medical industry during the height of AIDS, how women had to fight for equality in policies and work to be taken seriously by their peers and patients. It's all so consuming and depressing and interesting. A great read for those interested in the med field, don't let the datedness of it deter you. There's still so much to learn.

Matt Young says

This book is quite depressing, but I don't think there are any other books like it. Because of that, it's worth reading for anyone who's going to become a doctor, as well as for family members and friends of those individuals.

While requirements and regulations have changed for medical interns (1st year residents), I assume that the job is still incredibly rigorous and demanding. This book illustrates this from a 1st person perspective and shows what it takes to become a doctor.

Christine says

Well, this series of journal entries confirms that I will not become an MD in this lifetime. Considering how I get grumpy if I haven't eaten for 4 hours, I don't think I could make it through the grueling internship. Sorry, mom.

Sarah says

Fascinating. I can't imagine being that consistently sleep deprived and having to make as many life or death decisions as these doctors do...

Kyvan says

Reading about the medical world is much different than the idea most people have about it. This book is such a raw and honest account of what it's like to be an intern. Wanting to enter the medical field myself, I thoroughly enjoyed the accounts in this book. For anyone who is considering or just interested in medicine.

Mazola1 says

What do you suppose it would do to you if for a year you worked over 100 hours a week, sometimes for 36 hours in a row, got paid practically nothing, had life and death responsibility thrust upon you while you were unsure of your ability to handle it, were frequently awakened in the middle of the night to do mindless scrub work, and saw death, pain and grief on a daily basis? *The Intern Blues* gives answers to that question from three young doctors doing a pediatric internship in big New York hospitals.

Their answers are remarkably similar -- it warps, embitters, stresses and changes. Each intern dreaded and then hated the year, complaining of the long hours, hard work and lack of sleep. Each learned something about how to take care of patients under difficult circumstances, and each gained a measure of self-confidence, knowledge, and clinical judgment.

Dr. Marion calls internship "arguably the most vital transformation in all of medicine," turning green medical students into "battle-hardened" residents. In a sense, that's true. Skills are learned, confidence and the ability to make decisions independently are built, insecurities overcome. Along with that, cynicism and bitterness become constants of the young doctor's personality. Like most interns, these interns saw way too much death, and way too much suffering. They saw children with dreadful diseases that would claim their lives after a few short years of terrible, but useless, suffering. They saw children born with AIDS, with parents who abandoned them, children molested, beaten, burned by their parents. The transformation from clueless student to capable doctor was described by one of the interns turning fresh, "well-mannered and even-tempered with warmth in our hearts and great expectations" into "tattered, unshaven, smelly, cynical, snarling survivors of a long and somewhat meaningless struggle with ourselves and the rest of the world."

Dr. Marion calls his own internship the hardest and most devastating year of his life, and says that some of its pain, anger, exhaustion and anguish is still with him. The audiotaped diaries of the three interns that make up

this book bear him out, each telling the same tale in general, although the specific, painful details vary. Dr. Marion says that everyone who lives through internship is forever changed by the experience, they learn about medicine and the human body, and truly become a physician.

Dr. Marion says that "in the process, through the wearing down of the intern's spirit, that person also loses something he or she has carried, some innocence, some humanness, some fundamental respect," and asks at the end "Is it all worth it?" I suspect he thinks maybe it isn't -- that the price is too high. And his description of the process, coupled with the stories of these three doctors who went through that ordeal, raises some difficult questions. What struck me was that maybe some people aren't cut out to be doctors, and others are, and that this year brings that reality out.

Two of these doctors endured and hated the hard work, but decided that they'd learned to take care of patients, and this was something they could do and wanted to do. The other seemed not only to hate the work, but to hate his patients. He says one patient nauseated him. While not praise-worthy, that's not all that an unusual of a response. But the way this intern talks about this patient is, calling his child patient a "disgusting, horrible bag of piss-poor protoplasm." While it's tempting to think that this intern developed a morbid sense of humor to cope with the horror and stress of internship, I think I wouldn't like to have this guy as my doctor. Maybe only those who survive internship with a basic sense of decency left intact should be licensed as physicians. In a sense, internship tests not only the intellect, but the heart. We should all be lucky enough to be treated only by those doctors who survive both tests.

Imran Helal says

Though I don't have to work 100 hours per week as an Intern in nowadays, but a lot or I should say most of the feeling are still the same. "Timeless", yep, that's true.

olga tatiana rostkovska says

if you like reading about medicine as a system - how the doctors are made, how the decisions are reached - it's very insightful, if a little outdated. made really fun comparison to shows like 'Grey's Anatomy' ;)
follows the story of three interns, with added commentary from their supervisor/support system/advisor attending, throughout the internship year and then has a couple follow-ups in the later years.
real page-turner :)

Andrew says

I discuss the book here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Vdw_...

A good collection of memoirs of 3 interns working in various clinics. Some of the content, about 1/5,

addresses the personal lives of the interns which I was not interested in, but I understand the editors intention to show how the job affects all aspects of the intern's life. The book portrays the intern fairly negatively, not in the sense of criticism, but in the sense of despair. Not only are the hours grueling, but the working environment can be hostile not only from residents who oversee the interns, but also the patients and their parents. I believe two out of the three interns work in pediatrics. One thing that was interesting was the reasons for entering pediatrics given by at least one of the interns: children are less depressing when they get ill because they tend to recover more quickly and better (more resilient) than adults. On the other hand, the neonate ward with pre-term babies (usually underweight and other problems) often die and the book shows these events to hit the interns (and sometimes nurse-staff) quite hard.

I also detect a little bit of activism by the editor (who was a doctor connected with the interns and compiled the book). The editor speaks every now and then throughout the book in his own chapter. He talks about the conditions of interns, and eventually describes legislative action taken to limit the hours of interns per week and per day. Throughout the book the interns often fall asleep on the job, even when working on a patient. I cant quite fathom why this has been acceptable to government health regulators, Medical license boards, and Doctor unions. I can also assume that the gauntlet inflicted on interns comes from generational trauma ("I had to endure it, I survived, so you must too"). Hopefully some sense has entered the minds of these boards.

I was interested in reading the book because I was curious about the medical field. I was hoping the book went into more depth about the cases - for the most part it was quite terse on diagnosis procedures. On the other hand, the book does a great job of showing how terrible conditions are for these interns, as well as letting me pick up some doctor lingo (or 'internese,' as they called it).

One easy take-away from this memoir collection would be: The next time you're in the hospital, such as the ER, ask how long your doctor has been on shift. If its more than 24 hours, or if s/he appears sleepy, ask to be seen by someone else. Doing this would benefit both the medical profession as a whole, and the care you receive in particular.

Mitchell Rubiano says

Definitely a book to read if you have some level of seriousness in becoming a doctor. The diaries help you to get a true understanding of how grueling being a first-year resident is even though the three interns are all involved in pediatrics.

I only read the first 145 pages of this book and then stopped because even though I wanted to see the transformation the 3 Interns go through there comes a point when you only need to hear so many stories to understand how grueling the residency process is.

The one thing that really shocked me that all readers I think will appreciate is the level of detail that is seen in the diary entries.

Elaine Chapman says

This is a classic about medical training,... but if you are reading this book and contemplating medical school, it does not represent current practices/schedules.

