



# **Between Expectations: Lessons from a Pediatric Residency**

*Meghan MacLean Weir*

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When Dr. Meghan Weir first dons her scrubs and steps onto the floor of Children's Hospital Boston as a newly minted resident, her head is packed with medical-school-textbook learning. She knows the ins and outs of the human body, has memorized the correct way to perform hundreds of complicated procedures, and can recite the symptoms of any number of diseases by rote. But none of that has truly prepared her for what she is about to experience.

From the premature infants Dr. Weir is expected to care for on her very first day of residency to the frustrating teenagers who visit the ER at three in the morning for head colds, each day brings with it new challenges and new lessons. Dr. Weir learns that messiness, fear, and uncertainty live beneath the professional exterior of the doctor's white coat. Yet, in addition to the hardships, the practice of medicine comes with enormous rewards of joy, camaraderie, and the triumph of healing.

The three years of residency—when young doctors who have just graduated from medical school take on their own patients for the first time—are grueling in any specialty. But there is a unique challenge to dealing with patients too young to describe where it hurts, and it is not just having to handle their parents. In *Between Expectations: Lessons from a Pediatric Residency*, Dr. Weir takes readers into the nurseries, ICUs, and inpatient rooms of one of the country's busiest hospitals for children, revealing a world many of us never get to see. With candor and humility, she explores the many humbling lessons that all residents must learn: that restraint is sometimes the right treatment option, no matter how much you want to act; that some patients, even young teenagers, aren't interested in listening to the good advice that will make their lives easier; that parents ultimately know their own children far better than their doctors ever will.

Dr. Weir's thoughtful prose reveals how exhaustion and doubt define the residency experience just as much as confidence and action do. Yet the most important lesson that she learns through the months and years of residency is that having a good day on the floor does not always mean that a patient goes home miraculously healed—more often than not, success is about a steady, gradual discovery of strength. By observing the children, the parents, and other hospital staff who painstakingly provide care each day, Dr. Weir finds herself finally developing into the physician (and the parent) she hopes to become. These stories—sometimes funny, sometimes haunting—expose the humanity that is so often obscured by the doctor's white coat.

## **Between Expectations: Lessons from a Pediatric Residency Details**

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# From Reader Review Between Expectations: Lessons from a Pediatric Residency for online ebook

## Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

I am strangely fascinated by these type of books by medical professionals (and almost as equally addicted to shows like ER, House and Private Practice). Between Expectations is Meghan Weir's story of her residency in Paediatrics, her struggle with the losses and triumphs as she cares for sick newborns and dying children. Modern medicine is a miracle but still there is so much that cannot be answered or treated, where death or survival defies explanation. I think that in the Paediatrics ward that endless struggle between despair and hope must be amplified. Meghan shares the stories of some of her patients and their families. These tales are heartbreaking if you imagine a tumour wrapping around your child's heart, or the joy of a remission from cancer only for an unrelated infection to steal their mind. In those cases Meghan's shares of recovery the outcomes are usually ambiguous, the victories are small and quiet.

I think perhaps the book lacks some warmth, Meghan's tone tends to be more clinical than compassionate. I wonder how the birth of her own child will affect the relationships she builds with parents and her patients. I imagine that from Meghan's perspective tragedy is far more common than joy but I, particularly as a parent reading the book, would like at least one story of unbridled triumph, a miracle of sorts. Unrealistic perhaps, but I want to believe the possibility exists.

The training for residents is punishing and the ridiculous demands made on medical trainees in this day and age is clearly illustrated. I can see no reason for requiring 30 hour shifts in a field where a moment of inattention due to fatigue could kill someone. I cannot understand, nor condone, any justification for those conditions. Meghan's story emphasises the disconnect that results from such a consuming schedule, from patients, partners and family and even herself.

Between Expectations is an intriguing memoir, it has none of the glamour of Grey's Anatomy, but is a very personal and raw exploration of the personal and professional commitment required to become a doctor. While it lacks a spirit of optimism, it is reassuring in its way, that should you find yourself in a paediatrics ward with your child, that everyone will be doing all they can.

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## Abby says

I am a paramedic....not nearly as knowledgeable as a physician but I know enough to be dangerous. Becoming a doctor was my dream when I was younger, I was so set on it that any other outcome was utter failure. I adore being a medic, with someone giving a differential diagnosis on gut instinct and talking. I am not always right, and sometimes I can't do anything to make the situation better but ask my partner to drive faster.

This book was beyond profound. Death is the end to all of our stories. The wonder that is the human body leaves me in awe daily. Yet most people don't think about the large amount of children each day that are dying because their body wasn't made right. Their bodies are compatible with life. These stories will stay with me forever. My least favorite part of my job is to prolong someone's life who is in pain and no longer living the life they want. I can't imagine how horrible that is to witness in children. Death really isn't the worst thing that can happen to us, too much love and ill fated interventions are. I don't want to bring someone in this world for them to only experience suffering. I don't want to define someone else's life either but what I consider suffering. As humans we are all in life together. We are our own salvation and our own curse.

I am envious of all the doctors out there but I have one thing up on them....I get to go into someone's house and make them feel safe before leaving that house to go to the hospital. I am a part of that moment where a little relief sets in when they know that they are no longer alone in their emergency. Even if I can't do anything but drive them there, I get to be a part of their lives in some of the scariest moments. Healthcare is amazing but it should be more person care focused. If you're not happy, getting your liver fixed isn't going to suddenly make you happy.

I am grateful for the Healthcare access that we have in the US. The author traveling to Liberia was eye opening and gut wrenching. Everyone should lose sleep over innocent children dying merely because they were born in a poor country. It is a tragedy beyond words.

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### **Kristin says**

It's rare these days to find a first person account of a doctor's practice without a whole lot of philosophical fluff and filler on how things used to be, so Weir's novel was refreshing in that way. Judging by the prologue, this book was actually a vital part of her training in that she extended her residency by a year in order to keep from going out of her mind and used the downtime to write and have an outlet to the frustrations she'd been feeling to that point. Weir is blunt in saying that she hated her training, not because she had a change of heart while constantly surrounded by sick and dying kids, but because she battled complete exhaustion 100% of the time and didn't feel like she was giving the children her best. Her experience was not unique though, and given that this book was based on training in the early 2000s, I feel it is likely an accurate portrayal of programs across the nation.

In terms of the structure of the book, most patients and experiences are summarized in one section and do not reappear later on, though some of her chronically ill patients return to the hospital and others get recalled when Weir encounters a similar situation and explains how learning from the first patient helped her to treat the next one better. What I didn't get from the book was a delineation of her years of training. Late in the book, she mentions supervising others who were in the same year of training as she was at the beginning of the book, but the book wasn't broken into Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, etc. Therefore, I was never entirely sure what the 'expectations' referred to in the book title were of Weir at any given time. Other than the chapter where she writes of supervising the next generation of physicians, including one who isn't pulling her weight, and a later one where she travels to Africa to work in a clinic, I generally felt that Weir's role in treating her patients didn't evolve throughout the book. She alluded to finding zebras, yet in most cases, she was just following plans of care for patients already diagnosed, and wasn't doing much diagnosing herself.

Overall, I enjoyed the book, I was just left wanting a little more. She wrote of her time in the NICU, the Peds ICU, the cancer ward, and the chronic care service but again, those were all places where she largely inherited a group of patients and just tried to keep them alive until she passed them off to the next resident. Sure, writing about working in a clinic diagnosing colds, asthma attacks, diaper rash, etc would make for a boring book, but including work she did with acutely ill patients instead of the chronically ill would have added the variety I think was missing until her work in the African clinic at the end of the book.

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### **Andrea says**

Great insight into the world of pediatric care. I don't think one ever really thinks of the amount of work and sacrifice doctors go through and this book only talks about the beginning of that journey. It was tough reading about families painful visit to the NICU, ICU, and oncology units, but their stories added to the

learning experience of this doctor. Good read.

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## **Paul Pessolano says**

“Between Expectations: Lessons from a Pediatric Residency” by Meghan MacLean Weir, M.D...

Category – Medical/History

This book should be read by anyone in or interested in pediatrics, this includes Doctors, Nurses, and anyone who works in the field, or is thinking of working in the field of pediatrics. It is also a wonderful read for the casual reader, or those just interested in the medical profession.

Meghan is doing her residency in pediatrics and her first rotation is in NICU (neonatal intensive care unit). It is here that she is faced with the problems faced in the care of premature babies and their parents. Not only is she faced with dealing with the care of the infant but she must also inform the parents of their child’s condition. The conditions could range anywhere from very good to the devastating possibility that the child may be severely handicapped for life and the possibility of death.

Her second rotation is an area that she calls, “women troubles”. Here she finds herself dealing with young girls who have become sexually active. She deals with the possibility of these girls having gonorrhea, Chlamydia, syphilis, or AIDS.

In some cases these young girls do not even know what these diseases are, or that there are ways to prevent them.

Her third rotation is in MSICU, (medical surgical intensive care unit). This is an area where children are cared for who have lived longer than they ever have before but where doctors and nurses are fighting an almost impossible battle against certain death. The parents as well as the hospital staff know this and walk a thin line in keeping hope alive where there is no hope.

Her fourth rotation is in the children’s cancer ward. Here Meghan is able to see the ravages of cancer but she can also see that many of these children are cured and go on to live healthy and productive lives.

“Between Expectations” is an exceptional read and has a little something for everybody, and a lot more for most of us.

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## **Sonja says**

I really enjoyed this book. I like personal experiences and the author's writing improved as the book went along. Overall, she is a darn good writer. Also, she must be multi-talented as she accomplished so much in her life, leading up to being a doctor and a writer. I'm amazed she could find the time to do so much, and to do such a good job at each, when both are time-consuming careers. The sad part of the book was when she was in Liberia and how there were so many shortages in supplies/equipment the doctors there needed to save

peoples' lives. Here in the US, we have so much in the way of good health care even if it is way more expensive than it ever should be.

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### **Mary Ellen says**

There are so many sad realities that make up this young pediatrician's life. She describes her work so honestly and in such detail that not enough of her warmth and compassion shine through. I would welcome the chance to read this same book written when the author is 10 years into her career.

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### **Hillary says**

I think this author did a great job with this book - I'm not sure why others complain it lacks warmth & compassion. For me, the author's despair at the unsolvable problems she encountered is itself proof of her compassion.

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### **Susan says**

I have mixed feelings about the book. I love medical memoirs/autobiographies, and a personal connection to books about babies born premature. This book ticks those two boxes.

However, as others remarked, the author is at times very clinical, and I didn't really feel the emotional attachment while reading about her patients. Yet chapters later, she would reference those very same patients, and would bring up how important a certain patient was to her. I would find myself asking "which one is that?"

I'm sure that as a doctor or anyone who cares for people, especially babies, you do need to separate emotionally from them, so you can be able to do your job. I guess I just feel like the emotions are as important as the medical details when you write a memoir.

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### **Petra CigareX says**

This is a sad book. Almost all the patients, babies, little children and teenagers, die. Other reviewers have found the author cold and detached. I didn't but I can see why they thought so. The author rotates between different wards and also has an on/off schedule that allows her much time off as she can't cope with the stress and have a life. Because of this, there is little continuity between the cases, the children, she describes. She is involved though, she does go back to check on the little ones who were previously in her care when she is back on duty.

Really it's as much about the author as it is about the patients, it's just that the patients are more interesting

and as she writes less about them, it seems she is detached and cold. Those reviewers wanted a different book is all. This is a good read, definitely four stars.

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### **Shawna says**

I've read other doctor's memoirs and there was something about Dr. Weir's tone that rubbed me the wrong way and it is hard for me to put my finger on it. Perhaps it was the sense that every child she ever treated died--this can't possibly be the case, but this is what she chose to focus on. Perhaps it is the dismal tone that haunts this book, a reader might think that a healthy child has never been born. An interesting read, however, and worth a look, although I probably wouldn't recommend it to anyone who is expecting a child.

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### **Gabrielle says**

It was well written in terms of language but I felt the author was already jaded and condescending to some of her patients, which turned me off to her writing. I also thought it ended kind of abruptly.

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### **Lisa Clarke says**

I love the inside glimpse of our hallways! Especially her rotations through 7W and Gen Peds! That's my day, that's her day and that's what we do!

The undertones here are that many die... yes that's so very true but it's the lessons we take from each child that matter. We can't save them all, but we sure can fight for them. See ya around DrWeir!

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### **Ciara says**

just what it sounds like. essays that basically comprise a memoir about one doctor's experience as a pediatric resident. it started off awfully depressing, as the author is called to attend to the birth a very premature baby. the parents, naturally, request that everything possible be done to save the baby, & the doctors acquiesce, but the author reflects that in cases like this, it may be more humane to let the baby die, because such a premature infant faces so many health problems & can be affected by life-long disabilities. while this may be true, it's also kind of hard to fathom new parents being like, "yeah, let our baby die." & i read this even before i gave birth to my own premature infant (33 weeks, & pretty healthy for her gestational age--she was delivered for my health, not her own).

this book was definitely interesting, but more because of the subject matter & less because of the author. her writing style was surprisingly unengaging. i wonder what i would thin of it now that i have gone through having my baby in the NICU for a month?

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## **Rachel says**

I wanted and expected to like this book. It's well enough written, has the right balance of stories, introspection, and looking at a broader view. But something about how the author thinks puts me off. I mean, the title itself seems oddly removed from just experiencing life. She does have some happy moments, along with plenty of dissatisfaction, but it all seemed kind of indirect. She also rubbed me the wrong way in the beginning chapters with her outlook on childbirth. Yes, she saw all the high-risk situations and the worst outcomes. But, a healthy just-born baby actually doesn't have to cry or be handled roughly. And I hate it when doctors call the laboring woman or new mother "mom." Save that for your own mother. Oh, and writing in present tense can be awkward. I'm sure she and the editors carefully considered exactly in which sentences/paragraphs to use past tense, but I guess I disagree with their choices.

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