

# On Becoming a Doctor...

*Some books/documentaries you might enjoy before arriving at medical school.*

As a student, you will be under intense pressure to read what appears to be huge numbers of tracts directly related to medical science. This is clearly crucial to training to become a doctor. However, there are other books and resources you should not ignore. The practice of medicine is not purely scientific; the art of medicine is ill defined but involvement in other people's lives, other people's worlds, their hopes, and fears, demands that you keep in touch with the humanities. The insights that you gain will help you to understand your patients a little better.

Communication skills are central to being a doctor. All doctors must write, and this skill, often taught well at school, can atrophy. Reading literature can prevent this happening. Fiction is full of lies but these illuminate truths that no cramming will ever help you with.

This suggested resource list, selected by BSMS faculty and students, is by no means comprehensive. It is merely an eclectic selection of things you may enjoy but which also possess a deeper resonance. You have probably read/watched some of them already, and you certainly won't be examined on any of them. Feel free to pick and choose as you wish; there is no requirement to read/watch them all.

## Non-Fiction - Guides

- **Dev H, Metcalfe D, Sanders S (2013): *So you want to be a doctor? The ultimate guide to getting into medical school (Success In Medicine)*. Oxford University Press.**

“Over 100 medical students and admissions tutors have contributed to unique profiles of every medical school in the UK. An insider point-of-view on each school is complemented by straight-forward rankings of each school by the cost of living, the difficulty of the course, and the competition for each place.” Follow-up to the popular “So you want to be a brain surgeon?” guide.

- **Horner S, Barton J (2014): *Getting into Medical School: 2015 Entry*. Trotman Education.**

“Competition for Medical School places is tougher than ever, *Getting into Medical School* takes an honest look at what you really need to win your place on a medicine degree course.” Refined every year, this is a no-nonsense guidance book on the steps you need to take to get into Medical School. You should look for the most recent version for **your entry year**.

- **Richards P, Stockill S, Foster R, Ingall E (2007): Learning Medicine: How to Become and Remain a Good Doctor. Cambridge University Press.**  
“A must-read for anyone thinking of a career in medicine, or who is already in the training process and wants to understand and explore the various options and alternatives along the way.” A very readable guide that includes illustrations and personal anecdotes from medical students.
- **Smith, Dr Claire, (2018): The Silent Teacher: The Gift of Body Donation. Anatomically Correct.**  
“One single body donation could affect the lives of around ten million patients. Body donation is an amazing gift which enables doctors and healthcare professionals to understand the human body. Surgeons can refine existing surgical skills and develop new procedures to create better treatment for you. Dr Claire Smith goes through every aspect of donating a body, clearly describing what happens to a body once it has been donated, how it is used, how bodies are reassembled and then placed in coffins before cremation.”
- **Weinder, Howard L, (2006): Curing MS: How Science is Solving the Mysteries of Multiple Sclerosis. Three Rivers Press.**  
“Dr. Howard Weiner has spent nearly three decades trying to find answers to the mysteries of multiple sclerosis, an utterly confounding and devastating disease that afflicts almost half a million Americans. *Curing MS* is his moving, personal account of the long-term scientific quest to pinpoint the origins of the disease and to find a breakthrough treatment for its victims.  
Dr. Weiner is at the cutting edge of MS research and drug development, and he describes in clear and illuminating detail the science behind the symptoms and how new drugs may hold the key to "taming the monster.”

## Non-Fiction - Memoires

- **Bauby, J.D: The diving-bell and the butterfly. Fourth Estate**  
“Locked-in syndrome: paralysed from head to toe, the patient, his mind intact, is imprisoned inside his own body, unable to speak or move. In my case, blinking my left eyelid is my only means of communication.” Also a major film adaptation.
- **Blastland, M: Joe: The Only Boy in the World. Profile Books** “An exceptionally haunting memoir that also shows us what it is to be really human” In this memoir, Joe’s father describes having a son with autism.
- **Brown, A: The Prison Doctor: Women Inside: Stories from my Time Inside Britain’s Biggest Women’s Prison: The Only Boy in the World. Harper Collins**

“From the drug addicts who call Amanda ‘the mother I never had’ to the women who’ve pushed back at domestic abuse, to women close to release in their 70s, who just want to stay in the place that they’ve always known, these are stories that are heartbreaking, harrowing and heart-warming. Amanda listens, prescribes, and does what she can. After all, she’s their doctor.”

- **Easton, G: *The Appointment: What Your Doctor Really Thinks During Your Ten-Minute Consultation*. Robinson**  
“*The Appointment* offers an intimate and honest account of how a typical GP tries to make sense of a patient's health problems and manage them within the constraints of their health system and the short ten-minute appointment.”
- **Gawande, A: *Complications: A surgeon's notes on an imperfect science*. Profile Books.**  
“A stunningly well-written account of the life of a surgeon: what it is like to cut into people's bodies and the terrifying - literally life and death - decisions that have to be made. There are accounts of operations that go wrong; of doctors who go to the bad; why autopsies are necessary; what it feels like to insert your knife into someone.”
- **Kay, A (ed): *Dear NHS: 100 Stories to Say Thank You*, Trapeze.**  
“The NHS is our single greatest achievement as a country. No matter who you are, no matter what your health needs are, and no matter how much money you have, the NHS is there for you. In *Dear NHS*, 100 inspirational people come together to share their stories of how the national health service has been there for them, and changed their lives in the process.”
- **Kay, A: *This is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Junior Doctor*, Picador.**  
“Scribbled in secret after endless days, sleepless nights and missed weekends, Adam Kay's *This is Going to Hurt* provides a no-holds-barred account of his time on the NHS front line. Hilarious, horrifying and heartbreaking, this diary is everything you wanted to know – and more than a few things you didn't – about life on and off the hospital ward.” **Please note this book is not suitable for students under 16 years of age.**
- **Marsh, H. *Do No Harm: Stories of Life, Death and Brain Surgery*, W & N.**  
“*Do No Harm* offers an unforgettable insight into the highs and lows of a life dedicated to operating on the human brain, in all its exquisite complexity. With astonishing candour and compassion, Henry Marsh reveals the exhilarating drama of surgery, the chaos and confusion of a busy modern hospital, and above all the need for hope when faced with life's most agonising decisions.”
- **Nott, D: *War Doctor: Surgery on the Front Line*, Picador.**

*“For more than twenty-five years, David Nott has taken unpaid leave from his job as a general and vascular surgeon with the NHS to volunteer in some of the world’s most dangerous war zones. From Sarajevo under siege in 1993, to clandestine hospitals in rebel-held eastern Aleppo, he has carried out life-saving operations and field surgery in the most challenging conditions, and with none of the resources of a major London teaching hospital.”*

- **Pemberton, M: Trust me I’m a junior doctor. Hodder Books**

“Starting on the evening before he begins work as a doctor, this book charts Max Pemberton's touching and funny journey through his first year in the NHS.

- **Wishart, A: One in three. Profile Books.**

“Adam Wishart couldn't find any book that answered his questions when his father contracted cancer, so he decided to write one instead. Here is the exciting, encouraging and positive story of science's progress in changing cancer from what we die from to what we live with. Part memoir, part science, this book is the story of the author's father and ultimately the death of an old man, interweaved with the history of the discovery of cancer, its treatment and - increasingly now - its prevention.”

- **Sacks, O: The man who mistook his wife for a hat. Picador.**

“Oliver Sacks recounts the stories of patients lost in the bizarre, apparently inescapable world of neurological disorders. These are case studies of people who have lost their memories and with them the greater part of their pasts; who are no longer able to recognize people or common objects; whose limbs have become alien; who are afflicted and yet are gifted with uncanny artistic or mathematical talents.”

- **Shilts, R: And the band played on: Politics people and the aids epidemic. Souvenir Press Ltd.**

“And the band played on is the definitive history of the spread of AIDS throughout the USA in the 1980 s. Randy Shilts was employed by the The San Francisco Chronicle to cover gay issues in 1981, the year AIDS came to international attention, and from 1982 Shilts devoted himself to covering the story of the disease and its medical, social and political implications. Shilts asks: how was this epidemic allowed to spread so far before it was taken seriously?”

## Fiction:

- **Forster, E.M: A passage to India.**

Exploring issues of colonialism, faith and the limits of comprehension. “When Adela Quested and her elderly companion Mrs Moore arrive in the Indian town of Chandrapore, they quickly feel trapped by its insular and

prejudiced 'Anglo-Indian' community. Determined to escape the parochial English enclave and explore the 'real India', they seek the guidance of the charming and mercurial Dr Aziz, a cultivated Indian Muslim. But a mysterious incident occurs while they are exploring the Marabar caves with Aziz, and the well-respected doctor soon finds himself at the centre of a scandal that rouses violent passions among both the British and their Indian subjects."

- **Irving, J: The Cider House rules.**

Deals with ethics, doctors and their duties, medical practice, abortion. "Homer Wells' odyssey begins among the apple orchards of rural Maine. As the oldest unadopted child at St Cloud's orphanage, he strikes up a profound and unusual friendship with Wilbur Larch, the orphanage's founder - a man of rare compassion and an addiction to ether. What he learns from Wilbur takes him from his early apprenticeship in the orphanage surgery, to an adult life running a cider-making factory and a strange relationship with the wife of his closest friend."

- **Huxley,A: Brave New World**

"Far in the future, the World Controllers have created the ideal society. Through clever use of genetic engineering, brainwashing and recreational sex and drugs all its members are happy consumers. Bernard Marx seems alone harbouring an ill-defined longing to break free. A visit to one of the few remaining Savage Reservations where the old, imperfect life still continues may be the cure for his distress. Huxley's ingenious fantasy of the future sheds a blazing light on the present and is considered to be his most enduring masterpiece."

- **Haddon , M: The curious incident of the dog in the night-time**

"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a murder mystery novel like no other. The detective, and narrator, is Christopher Boone. Christopher is fifteen and has Asperger's Syndrome. He knows a very great deal about maths and very little about human beings. He loves lists, patterns and the truth. He hates the colours yellow and brown and being touched. He has never gone further than the end of the road on his own, but when he finds a neighbour's dog murdered, he sets out on a terrifying journey which will turn his whole world upside down."

- **Cronin, AJ: The Citadel**

"A newly qualified doctor Andrew Manson takes up his first post in a Welsh mining community, and brings with him a bagful of idealism and enthusiasm. Both are soon strained as Andrew discovers the reality of performing operations on a kitchen table and washing in a scullery, of common infantile cholera and enteritis. There are no X-rays, no ambulances – nothing to combat the disease and poverty. The Citadel is a moving story of tragedy, triumph and redemption, and was influential in the creation of the NHS."

## Documentaries/Television:

- **Kelly, S (Producer): 24 Hours in A & E, Channel 4**  
“Cameras film around the clock in some of Britain's busiest A&E departments, where stories of life, love and loss unfold every day.”
- **Doyle, P; Stadlen, J; Sadler, A (Producers): GPs: Behind Closed Doors, Channel 5**  
“The fascinating observational documentary series that takes viewers into the private world of a local GP surgery.”
- **Smith, J; Newby, F; Bowden, L; Charker-Phillips, L (Producers): One Born Every Minute, Channel 4**  
“A ground-breaking look at the drama and emotion of a maternity unit, from the perspective of the parents-to-be and the maternity ward staff.”
- **Caldwell, F; Freedman, D; Holland, P; McClellan, K (Producers): An Hour to Save Your Life, BBC TWO**  
“Medical science series exploring the life or death decisions facing doctors in the first critical hour of emergency care.”