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BOOK REVIEW

The Good Doctor: What Patients Want

Ron Paterson

Review by Susan J Hawken

In *The Good Doctor: What Patients Want* Professor Paterson puts the spotlight on the doctor through the lens of the patient. He writes for all involved in health care—patients, doctors, advocacy groups, policy makers and educationalists. He challenges us all to take action on an individual and collective level to ensure that doctors are competent—that is, ‘good enough’.

The book is divided into four parts with each focusing on an important aspect of his argument.

Firstly, he outlines what an ideal doctor is and carefully references this to good quality research in the area. He goes on to describe the reality in the New Zealand health context describing the ‘problem doctor’. This is achieved predominantly through cases he was involved in during his time as Health and Disability Commissioner, but there is also reference to international cases. The third part explores barriers holding back change that would help to address the competence of doctors. This includes examining what he sees as the key components—undemanding patients, overburdened doctors, reluctant regulators, medical culture and legal constraints. This section was interesting and the commentary on medical culture insightful.

Finally he provides a prescription for change, and includes an overview of the re-certification procedures in North America

and the UK that was informative. Although acknowledging primary care’s innovation in the past, he lays down a specific challenge to general practitioners by stating that PHOs should be publicly publishing comparative quality information down to the level of individual practices.

Overall his argument is very well constructed, it is easy to read, and well referenced. It is challenging and there may be a sense of disquiet around the issue of collecting and sharing our own quality performance data with regard to care of our patients. The key issue highlighted though was that surely as a profession we can honour our commitment to professionalism by addressing issues of competence in ourselves and others in a rigorous, systematic way that assures the public they are in good hands.

I would recommend this thought-provoking book. Maybe we need to be initiating more conversations with patients about what they do want to know about doctors, contributing to the debate on how best to address actual practitioner performance, and taking some action.

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