

Book Recommendations from Resident Physicians

In August The Community and Wellbeing Committee asked you to share a favourite book. The following is a list of the recommendations that we received. If you would like to share a recommendation, email [Robin Raworth](mailto:Robin.Raworth) with the title, author, and brief description.

When Breath Becomes Air

by Paul Kalanithi

This is a very powerful read. I have reread the book as a resident and it is a very profound reflection on our profession and life in general - and what gives both of these meaning.

The House of God

by Samuel Shem

Why I would recommend this book: For me, reading this book for the first time as a do-eyed medical student, this book was a rude but necessary awakening. This satirical novel is a classic that has stood of the test of time and bemused generations of medical trainees. It is at once outrageous, frenetic, hilarious and sad, all at the same time. Underlying the witty scenes and bawdy jokes, there's this subtle criticism of medicine in how it is taught, practiced and delivered. In describing a journey seen through the eyes of a new resident, the book quickly shatters the notion that the world of medicine is a squeaky-clean well-oiled machine that epitomizes human efficiency, intelligence, and empathy; rather, in broad strokes, the book paints medicine -- and medical training, in particular -- as a mish-mash mission for individual survival that is ruled by politics, personalities, hierarchy, and rules that sometimes defy common sense. The book reminds us that the profession of medicine, while celebrated and worshipped for its role in society, is ultimately as human as it gets, for all its flaws and imperfections.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime

by Mark Haddon

This is a beautiful short story of a crime investigation from the perspective of a child with autism. It's so well written, easy to read, and conveys all the differences in world view and challenges faced by people with ASD.

The Power of Now

by Eckhart Tolle

An interesting perspective on the importance of living in the now and being present in every moment. In clinic or on call, this makes all the difference. By living in the moment I am able to fully be there for my patients, make better decisions with them, and better understand my thoughts and emotions at any given time. This book has shown me a way to provide higher quality patient care while also improving my own well-being and life experiences. It is not just a great read, but it's something I can refer back to all the time to keep learning and stay grounded!

Free Will

by Sam Harris

This book completely transformed my world view. It has been especially useful for my residency – psychiatry. Now that I see that we have no “free will”, it allows me to have a great amount of compassion for all people, no matter how difficult they may be. It is an especially useful way of viewing people in psychiatry. No matter who my patient is, no matter how difficult it is to build rapport, or even how “morally repugnant” my patient is, I have a view of acceptance and compassion. As my patient did not choose whether they were born or not, whether they have a supportive, nurturing family or not, whether they have access to education or not, whether they have a “high IQ”, what their baseline disposition or personality is like. And add to that there is no free will either, we can focus more on how do we help this patient, no matter what mistakes they’ve made, no matter how difficult their personality is, I will accept them, and I will see how I can help.

A Fine Balance

by Rohinton Mistry

This book is very captivating and a story of unlikely friendships that survive significant hardships placed by society and individuals. This book is set in India in the mid 1970s where civil liberties were reduced at the name of wiping out corruption. The book revolves its story around several main characters with differing viewpoints from all walks of life including: Two tailors who climbed up the caste system from their village to go to the big city; a young man who lives a sheltered life in a remote mountain village and is naïve to the brutal reality of the big city, and a young widow who wishes to continue to have her independence; despite societal traditions and norms. This book

highlights to me the "balance" between hardships and brutalities that as individuals and society we can inflict on each other; but all the while recognizing beauty in even the most difficult of times in life. A definite page-turner!

Your Heart is the Size of Your Fist: A Doctor Reflects on Ten Years at a Refugee Clinic

By Martina Scholtens, MD

Dr. Scholtens, who spent the last ten years working at a Vancouver refugee clinic, shares funny, sweet, and heartbreaking stories from her time there with grace and candor. I think she really captures the spirit of family medicine, and reading this book helped me to rethink how I interact and communicate with patients.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

By Anne Fadiman

The Spirit Catches You is a sad, beautiful, complicated story that is ostensibly about a tragedy that arose from a clash of cultures around the care of a Hmong child, Lia Lee, with epilepsy. Lia's story reinforces both the challenges and importance of culturally centred care, and provides meaningful insights, which are particularly relevant to health care providers. The author intercuts her narrative of Lia's care with sections on the history of the Hmong, and the complicated system of rituals and beliefs that govern Hmong life.

Atomic Habits

By James Clear

It is a practical and evidence-based book on building better habits and building a purpose-driven life. I have learned a lot about designing strategies that build you up for success and reduce friction to consistently uphold empowering practices.

God's Hotel

By Victoria Sweet

Sweet is an internist in the USA and writes beautifully and insightfully about medicine, life and purpose. A must read for anyone considering medicine and really for anyone interested in what it means to care for another person.

The Glass Castle

By Jeannette Walls

It's hard to pick a "favourite book" but this is one I read recently and really enjoyed. It is well-written and delves into the author's compelling and complex family dynamics. It made me reflect on my own childhood as well as contemplate many social issues my patients experience or have experienced in their pasts. 5/5

Educated

By Tara Westover

A memoir about a woman who overcomes her situation being brought up in survivalist family to complete a post secondary degree. It was an addictive, fascinating story that makes you think about family, mental health, and perseverance.

Origin

By Dan Brown

Interesting story with known character Prof Langdon with mix of fantastic and real scientific facts touching on the problem of life creation.

The Art of Thinking Clearly

By Rolf Dobelli

This book explains common thinking errors that humans consistently make and uses entertaining examples to explain them. This is kind of the perfect book for residency since there isn't really a beginning or end, so you can pick it up and start or stop reading wherever you want. Overall, I most enjoyed seeing what I was reading appearing in everyday life – in my own thinking or other's.

Tuesdays with Morrie

By Mitch Albom

Frank and candid, addressing many of life's questions from a unique, but relatable perspective. Short chapters make it an easy read when you have brief moments of free time.

The Brain's Way of Healing

By Norman Doidge

The book nicely intertwines storytelling and medicine to describe how the brain changes with our experience and activities.

Red Rising

By Pierce Brown

This book combines action, sci-fi, family, and sacrifice in one plot centred around the themes of honour and power. It is not a difficult read, but I couldn't put it down! You as the reader relates to not only the protagonist, but many of the other characters as well, some of whom are the antagonists as well. One of the main antagonists is a highly honourable character, who could be considered a better human than the protagonist. This kind of moral ambiguity keeps you hooked and invested in all the characters.

Sapiens

By Yuval Novah Harari

This book has excellent insight into human history and humanity.

Kitchen Confidential

By Anthony Bourdain

Before his recent tragic passing, Anthony Bourdain was one of the most influential chefs and globe trotters. He wasn't afraid to try any food and shared his meals with influential people like Barack Obama. This novel describes his hectic upbringing and his crazy life as a chef, giving a glimpse into the type of person he really was. An easy read that you won't want to put down until you finish!

Daring Greatly

By Brene Brown

Brene Brown gives an in-depth discussion of courage and vulnerability and the societal norms that push us away from both. As residents, we encounter uncertainty and challenges on a daily basis. Brene Brown gives some strategies to lean into that uncertainty to learn and evolve.

Talking to Strangers

By Malcolm Gladwell

It is a great non-fiction book that uses day to day and historical events to understand the assumptions and mistakes we make when dealing with people we don't know. It is easy to read and also comes in an audio book, which is nice to listen to when commuting to work. If you are a fan of his podcast Revisionist History, you will definitely love this book.

A History of Canada in Ten Maps

By Adam Shoalts

This book narrates the history of Canada in an engaging way, using 10 different maps as jumping off points for stories and intrigue that bring history to life. The stories are based on explorers of different times, and it is written by the foremost Canadian explorer in modern times, so if you enjoy history, adventure, or are just a patriotic Canadian, I'm sure you would enjoy this book!

The Alice Network

By Kate Quinn

A well written book centered around an intelligence network in World War I. Switches between points of view and timelines. Multidimensional characters who have both mundane and exciting moments. Humour is woven throughout and I laughed many times when reading!

Ender's Game

By Orson Scott Card

Brilliant characters and a unique sci-fi plot make this a pleasure to read. The best and brightest of humanity's young minds are sent to a military training school to train in the fight against an unknown alien force.

City of Thieves

By David Benioff

It's able to infuse some levity into a very grim historical event without glossing over the macabre details. It was a very easy read (listen) and often made me laugh out loud (while walking my dog).

The Power of I Am

By Joel Osteen

I love this book because it focuses on how to re-frame your thinking – shifting negative thoughts into positive ones through the use of “I Am ____”. For example “I am strong, I am confident, I am worthy”. I used to be very critical of myself, but once I read this book I changed the way I was thinking, shifting negative thoughts into positive ones. It definitely takes some time and effort to do this, but I found my overall mental health improved significantly and got me through some tough times in my life. I would recommend this book to everyone!