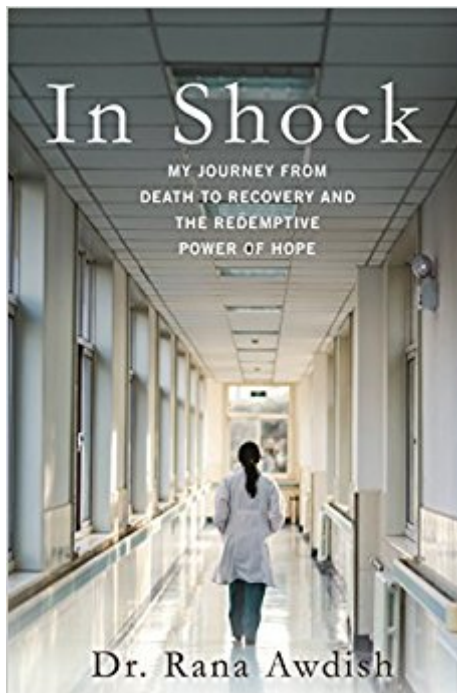




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# **In Shock: My Journey From Death To Recovery And The Redemptive Power Of Hope**



## Synopsis

In *Shock* is a riveting first-hand account from a young critical care physician, who in the passage of a moment is transfigured into a dying patient. This transposition, coincidentally timed at the end of her medical training, instantly lays bare the vast chasm between the conventional practice of medicine and the stark reality of the prostrate patient. A hauntingly perceptive and beautifully written, it allows the reader to transform alongside her, and watch what she discovers in our carefully cultivated, yet often misguided standard of care. The author demonstrates through engaging narrative and laser-sharp wit how the unbearable is borne. She comes to understand the fatal flaws in her profession and in her own past actions as a physician. She also achieves, through unflinching presence, a crystalline vision of a new and better possibility. A Using her exceptional recall, Awdish fashions an elegant, yet urgent call to action. A As she finds herself up against the same self-protective partitions she was trained to construct as a medical student and physician, she artfully illuminates the dysfunction of disconnection. Shatteringly personal, and yet wholly universal, she offers a brave roadmap for anyone navigating illness. At the same time, she presents physicians with a new paradigm and rationale for embracing the emotional bond between doctor and patient. All told, she cogently outlines the redemptive possibilities of dismantling the barriers to connection in all relationships.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In *Shock* should be required reading in every medical, nursing and health professional school. Dr. Awdish cuts to the core of what is ailing the healthcare system: a loss of humanity. Her honest and poignant appraisal of how modern medicine systematizes illness and suffering is a wake up call to

rethink medical pedagogy and the concept of how we truly heal. Ultimately, she gives us hope that through better understanding of each other and ourselves, we can reinvigorate the human connection at the heart of healthcare." *—Andrew J. Shin, JD, MPH, Senior Director, Policy, The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare*"A compassionate and critical look at medicine and illness from both a doctor's and a patient's perspective...Awdish has written a unique and insightful memoir." *—Publisher's Weekly*"A sobering, well-rendered reality check on the desperate need for advanced training on compassion-centric modes of patient care."

*—Kirkus Reviews*"Dr. Rana Awdish brings the much-needed voice of the patient to life in a courageous retelling of her catastrophic illness and stunning revelations of the major disconnect between the communication caregivers deliver and what patients need. Rana's story is not only compelling; it's a call to action. This book will, hopefully, spur the change needed to develop a culture of empathy among providers beginning in our training programs and carrying through to practices, hospitals and health systems." *—Wright Lassiter III, President & CEO, Henry Ford Health System*"Dr. Rana Awdish suffered through catastrophic illness and loss as a young physician. Her perspective on her experiences as a patient transformed her understanding of how medicine is practiced today. *In Shock* reminds us of the essential aspect of the individual narrative and the vital importance of communication; not just between patients and their doctors but between doctors and themselves. Dr. Awdish's compassion for both her patients and those providing care for patients comes from profound insight into the vulnerability that illness imposes and the suffering that asks for acknowledgement and understanding." *—Susan Clark Ball, M.D., M.P.H., M.S., Associate Professor of Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College and Assistant Director of the Bernbaum Unit, Center for Special Studies, New York Presbyterian Hospital*"*In Shock* is an ideal text for courses in narrative medicine, and similar classes that are now increasingly taught under a variety of names in medical schools nationwide. It is a welcome addition to a canon that includes such diverse works as Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller*, Danielle Ofri's *Singular Intimacies*, and *What Patients Say, What Doctors Feel*, Samuel Shem's *The House of God*. Together, these works lay bare the dilemma of the doctor in the age of the modern estrangement from care (as opposed to cure) and in bearing witness to this crisis, they urge us forward." *—Matthew von Unwerth, Program in Narrative Medicine, Columbia University*"Devastating and life-affirming all at the same time. As a fellow physician and mom, I found myself immersed in *In Shock*, both by Rana Awdish's description of her heartbreaking losses as well as her triumphs of making it back to life repeatedly, to ultimately tell this story so beautifully. She reminds us all of the critical importance of maintaining our

“human-ness” when we are taking care of the very ill.” Lynn E. Fiellin, M.D., Associate Professor of Medicine and the Yale Child Study Center, Yale University School of Medicine

“This book is remarkable” should be required reading for every medical caregiver. In Shock is so beautifully written, so full of wisdom about illness, emotional connection and ripe with ideas for improving communication with my patients. I was so moved by Dr. Awdish’s courage, resilience and passion to improve medical practice.

Jeffrey Millstein, MD, Penn Medicine “A very important book and the perfect antidote to the ever increasing canon of rather self-congratulatory medical literature hitting our shelves. Awdish looks at the way we practice medicine with a combination of love and outrage. She writes beautifully about the secret, shameful feelings many doctors feel they have to hide and she shows us how we might do better. After reading this book, I feel like a different doctor.” Dr. Gabriel Weston, author of Direct Red: A Surgeon’s Story

“Perhaps the bravest book that I have ever read in its gripping honesty and powerful lessons. An unrivaled view of healthcare as it really is” its triumphs and missteps through the riveting, nakedly honest story of a physician who became seriously ill...reads like a page-turning novel.

Leonard L. Berry, Ph.D., Regents Professor, Mays Business School, Texas A&M University and Senior Fellow, Institute for Healthcare Improvement “When Rana Awdish’s brief description of her medical experiences was published in The New England Journal of Medicine, one leading health care expert (who did not know Rana) tweeted that everyone who takes care of patients should read it. The same is true for In Shock, her book that describes her medical ordeal and the insights that flowed from it. Her story of her clinical problems and what she experienced as she endured them reads like The Odyssey. The moment toward the end when she takes the stage to describe her experiences for her medical colleagues is nothing less than electrifying. And the insights about the nature of healing with which she concludes her book are an inspiration.” Tom Lee, Chief Medical Officer for Press Ganey Associates, Inc. “In Shock is a brilliantly written account of Awdish’s near death experience and what it is like to be on the “other side” of medicine. Through her sometimes shocking, often heartbreaking and always honest storytelling, Awdish poignantly brings to the forefront both our collective and individual shortcomings despite our best intentions. She clearly demonstrates the necessity and urgency for us to move away from “The House of God” culture, where we were trained to detach and depersonalize, to one that needs to be centered around empathy and caring, not just for the sake of our patients, but for our own humanity. The next generation will look back on In Shock as a transformational book and it will be mandatory reading for everyone in healthcare.”

Sara Hegab, MD, Senior Staff Physician, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Henry

DR. RANA AWDISH is the Director of the Pulmonary Hypertension Program at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit and a Critical Care Physician. She was recently named Medical Director of Care Experience for the (\$6 billion, 24,000 employee) Health System. She was awarded the Speak-Up Hero award in 2014 for her work on improving communication, as well as the Critical Care Teaching Award in 2016. In 2017 she was named a finalist for the Schwartz Center's 2017 National Compassionate Caregiver of the Year (NCCY) Award and awarded the Physician of the Year award from the Press Ganey National Client Conference. Dr. Awdish is board-certified in Internal Medicine, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine.

There aren't enough superlatives to describe how I feel about this book. First, in briefest summary, this story is written by Dr. Rana Awdish and tells the harrowing story of her near-fatal medical disaster suffered in her 7th month of pregnancy. Dr. Awdish had formerly been an ICU doctor and now she found herself on the opposite side; experiencing life as a patient in a ICU unit. Her life hung in the balance for weeks, and it really took years of ups and downs after devastating setbacks for her to finally recover. She is now a working ICU doctor again and she also gives seminars and speeches on her experience and hopefully this will help doctors and patients alike. I have read several books similar to this, and indeed it reminded me a bit of 1991 movie starring William Hurt called The Doctor. In that movie an arrogant doctor finds himself suddenly becoming a patient and the experience humbles him and changes his life. Dr. Awdish did not need humbling before her experience - but what reminded me so much of that movie was that she was forever changed afterwards and that she was able to share her amazing insights with us. What a gift, truly. I could go on and on gushing about this book. She describes how devastating it is for anyone to find themselves suddenly very ill and being without control and how normal, healthy people don't, or maybe can't understand how that can feel. As Virginia Woolf once said, and I must paraphrase, there really is a land of the sick and a land of the well. Dr. Awdish so eloquently stated: "I had lost my sense of myself as a strong, capable, independent person." It's so hard to truly understand this unless you've been there. As Dr. Awdish points out, it is the little things that doctors and other health personnel can say or do that can make such a difference for the patient. She does such a wonderful job going into detail about this. (As a side-note and example - I went to have an echocardiogram today and the technician stopped in the middle of the test, looked worried, and went back to my chart and came back. I looked at her concerned and she looked back at me and smiled and said,

"everything looks good I was just checking something on the chart," and I smiled and thought of this book - this was exactly the kind of thing Dr. Awdish was talking about, and I thanked the tech for the explanation.) What Dr. Awdish does go on to explain to us is how doctors were trained to distance themselves from patients - that feeling empathy was actually a bad thing because it was believed it could interfere in their treatment of a patient and it could overwhelm them personally. And of course that is understandable. At the same time, she goes on to explain that this is not necessarily the case - you can feel empathy and show caring; and sometimes you just need to be more conscious of things you say and do in front of your patient. She also explains how it's not good for the interns and the doctors alike to not be able to talk about their own feelings of failure or loss. I really do hate to summarize anything she says in this book because she says it so beautifully herself. I have dog-eared so many pages that I think that this book may fly if I were to throw it in the air. In her own words: "Perhaps it speaks poorly of me that I needed to become a patient to see cracks in our face. Did I not have enough empathy or perspective to understand the magnitude of the suffering that was all around me until it affected me directly? It's possible. But that doesn't resonate with who I understand myself to be. Closer to the truth is that I'm not entirely to blame. I came to medicine with an open heart, and somewhere during my training I was taught to wall it off. We all were. We were implicitly and explicitly instructed on the absolute necessity of partitions, measured distance and *aequanimitas*. We were taught not only that it would save us, but if we didn't somehow find a way to do it, we would kill those we were put there to protect. Our feelings were a direct threat to our patients. It was impossible to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients if we felt something as they decompensated in front of us, struggled with cancer diagnoses in our office, and lost their dignity to disease. It was a lie. It is entirely possible to feel someone's pain, acknowledge their suffering, hold it in our hands and support them with our presence without depleting ourselves, without clouding our judgment. But only if we are honest about our own feelings. Physicians are prone to all the same human emotions of pride and guilt and denial and shame that distort our reason. We are just trained to believe we can surmount them. Emotions tended to can be claimed. Those we deny will always float. Allowing space for our feelings when we've been trained to deny them is not selfish, it's necessary, both for ourselves and for our patients." I so highly recommend this book. It is a must for everyone in the medical field and would be of great interest to anyone else, including those who have suffered from a serious illness or know someone who has. And as pointed out in the book, since that is inevitable in life, well then I guess I would recommend this book to everyone.

The title of the book suggests that this is a memoir about the author's illness and recovery. It is that,

but it is so much more. Its real subject is the communication between doctors and patients. Its message is that so many physicians, either because they haven't been trained, or out of simple arrogance, weariness, absence of empathy, often fail their patients and do real harm by the things they say, or don't say (or their failure to make any effort to connect.) The author recounts her horrendous experience as a patient with repeated severe problems, the loss of a pregnancy and the near loss of a second pregnancy. She narrates the things that were said to her along the way -- or the things that were said by doctors who mistakenly assumed she could not hear what they were saying. One physician who prescribed Lasix even though it was a poor choice, one that he himself questioned, answered her questions by saying only "It wasn't my call." One said, near her bedside "She's circling the drain." Another said, after she had been through unspeakable trauma and loss "At least you didn't die." These and other gems of thoughtlessness, insolence, ignorance, are re-listed in italics near the end of the book as a kind of rounding-up summary of so many of the terrible encounters she had with physicians when she herself became a patient. But she also narrates some good stories, accounts of a hand held that made all the difference. She tells the story of a physician who said the things he had been told to say in her own training program: "I won't leave until you are better and can breathe on your own." She recounts that when she became a patient and heard those words, but also knew that they were sincere, that it made so much difference to her. She also tells about all the grief and misery that physicians hold inside -- the remorse because a patient died, whether or not it was their fault or anything could possibly have saved them. She tells one particularly harrowing story about the father of a patient who, learning from a doctor who used the wrong words, that his daughter was past saving, went home and committed suicide. These physicians have been trained to work as hard as possible to push back against death, but they have not been trained to stand side by side with the patient to face death, inevitability, and pain. Only now are physicians starting to get the training they need to develop empathy and strategies for finding the right words and gestures to communicate. The author is in the forefront of developing curriculum for this training.

I was totally absorbed by this book. But it was a difficult experience to read. However, it gave me insight into some of the experiences that I know my daughter-in-law physician must have gone through. I have seen how she suffered when a patient died, but this book gave me a fuller understanding of the depth and texture of those feelings of failure, helplessness, sorrow. I have read many books by author physicians (Atul Gawande, Abraham Verghese, Sherwin Nuland, and many others) but I have never encountered anything as harrowing to read as this book -- not because of the blood-and-guts (though there is much of that here too) but because of the depth of the grief depicted. The book narrates many of the harms done

to patients, but some of the greatest sorrows were those of their doctors. Beautifully and thoughtfully written.

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