


# Making Medical Knowledge

*By Miriam Solomon*

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**Making Medical Knowledge** By Miriam Solomon

How is medical knowledge made? New methods for research and clinical care have reshaped the practices of medical knowledge production over the last forty years. Consensus conferences, evidence-based medicine, translational medicine, and narrative medicine are among the most prominent new methods. *Making Medical Knowledge* explores their origins and aims, their epistemic strengths, and their epistemic weaknesses. Miriam Solomon argues that the familiar dichotomy between the art and the science of medicine is not adequate for understanding this plurality of methods. The book begins by tracing the development of medical consensus conferences, from their beginning at the United States' National Institutes of Health in 1977, to their widespread adoption in national and international contexts. It discusses consensus conferences as social epistemic institutions designed to embody democracy and achieve objectivity. Evidence-based medicine, which developed next, ranks expert consensus at the bottom of the evidence hierarchy, thus challenging the authority of consensus conferences. Evidence-based medicine has transformed both medical research and clinical medicine in many positive ways, but it has also been accused of creating an intellectual hegemony that has marginalized crucial stages of scientific research, particularly scientific discovery. Translational medicine is understood as a response to the shortfalls of both consensus conferences and evidence-based medicine. Narrative medicine is the most prominent recent development in the medical humanities. Its central claim is that attention to narrative is essential for patient care. Solomon argues that the differences between narrative medicine and the other methods have been exaggerated, and offers a pluralistic account of how the all the methods interact and sometimes conflict. The result is both practical and theoretical suggestions for how to improve medical knowledge and understand medical controversies.

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Review

"...it is erudite, informative, provocative, and repays with interest engagement with its clearly written text and the author's long experience with medical and scientific epistemology. It is a superlative reference for anyone seeking to find out about modern medical epistemology. Philosophers of medicine and science, sociologists, and historians of medicine will find it of particular value." -- *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*

"Miriam Solomon (philosophy, Temple Univ.) has written an excellent work that explores common methods of creating medical knowledge...The book is part history and part philosophy, and though Solomon succeeds in both areas, the philosophical and analytical discussions interspersed throughout really stand out and help readers unpack the complexities of each topic. The book is well researched, with plentiful references and footnotes, but does not read in a stereotypically dry, academic way. On the contrary, the book is a pleasure to read. Each chapter is organized into manageable sections, and the index is thorough. This is a well-written, well-organized, and well-constructed book, certainly worth the investment for those interested in any aspect of medicine...Recommended." -- *Choice*

"The audiences who stand to gain most from this book are undergraduate students in history or philosophy, and perhaps health care professionals with a keen interest in understanding recent developments in medicine...The book achieves a goal more important than overcoming art versus science, to my mind, in that it demonstrates in very clear terms and through example how short-sighted it is to be a selective dogmatist about methods, since it means giving up on methods that are quite good for specific purposes, while ignoring the ways that the "chosen" method falls short. This is a lesson worth learning, relearning, and discussing both within medicine and beyond." -- *Metascience*

"*Making Medical Knowledge* is a valuable contribution that carefully untangles important epistemic questions in medicine." -- *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews Online*

"*Making Medical Knowledge* is well written, and Solomon's review of the philosophical arguments behind the ongoing debate about evaluating health technology is clear and insightful...[a] brilliant book." -- *Hastings Center Report*

"In this accessible, well-written book, Miriam Solomon reviews four interrelated but largely independent methods of medical knowledge production: the consensus conference, evidence-based medicine, translational medicine, and narrative medicine...Solomon's lucid and expert exploration of these four methods of knowledge production provocative and insightful. This book works as a stand-alone assessment

of contemporary medical knowledge and as a stimulus for further research." -- *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*

About the Author

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Miriam Solomon is Professor of Philosophy at Temple University. She has a BA in Natural Sciences from Cambridge University and a PhD in Philosophy from Harvard University. Her first book was *Social Empiricism* (MIT Press, 2001) and she is the author of many articles in philosophy of medicine, philosophy of science, gender and science, epistemology and bioethics. She is a Fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

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