

How Doctors Think

By Jerome Groopman

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On average, a physician will interrupt a patient describing her symptoms within eighteen seconds. In that short time, many doctors decide on the likely diagnosis and best treatment. Often, decisions made this way are correct, but at crucial moments they can also be wrong -- with catastrophic consequences. In this myth-shattering book, Jerome Groopman pinpoints the forces and thought processes behind the decisions doctors make. Groopman explores why doctors err and shows when and how they can -- with our help -- avoid snap judgments, embrace uncertainty, communicate effectively, and deploy other skills that can profoundly impact our health. This book is the first to describe in detail the warning signs of erroneous medical thinking and reveal how new technologies may actually hinder accurate diagnoses. How Doctors Think offers direct, intelligent questions patients can ask their doctors to help them get back on track.

Groopman draws on a wealth of research, extensive interviews with some of the country’s best doctors, and his own experiences as a doctor and as a patient. He has learned many of the lessons in this book the hard way, from his own mistakes and from errors his doctors made in treating his own debilitating medical problems.

How Doctors Think reveals a profound new view of twenty-first-century medical practice, giving doctors and patients the vital information they need to make better judgments together.

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How Doctors Think By Jerome Groopman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #106464 in Books
- Brand: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Published on: 2007-03-19
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .75" w x 6.00" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 307 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. Signature*Reviewed by* Perri KlassI wish I had read this book when I was in medical school, and I'm glad I've read it now. Most readers will knowJerome Groopman from his essays in the *New Yorker*, which take on a wide variety of complex medical conditions, evocatively communicating the tensions and emotions of both doctors and patients.But this book is something different: a sustained, incisive and sometimes agonized inquiry into the processes by which medical minds—brilliant, experienced, highly erudite medical minds—synthesize information and understand illness. *How Doctors Think* is mostly about how these doctors get it right, and about why they sometimes get it wrong: "[m]ost errors are mistakes in thinking. And part of what causes these cognitive errors is our inner feelings, feelings we do not readily admit to and often don't realize." Attribution errors happen when a doctor's diagnostic cogitations are shaped by a particular stereotype. It can be negative: when five doctors fail to diagnose an endocrinologic tumor causing peculiar symptoms in "a persistently complaining, melodramatic menopausal woman who quite accurately describes herself as kooky." But positive feelings also get in the way; an emergency room doctor misses unstable angina in a forest ranger because "the ranger's physique and chiseled features reminded him of a young Clint Eastwood—all strong associations with health and vigor." Other errors occur when a patient is irreversibly classified with a particular syndrome: "diagnosis momentum, like a boulder rolling down a mountain, gains enough force to crush anything in its way." The patient stories are told with Groopman's customary attention to character and emotion. And there is great care and concern for the epistemology of medical knowledge, and a sense of life-and-death urgency in analyzing the well-intentioned thought processes of the highly trained. I have never read elsewhere this kind of discussion of the ambiguities besetting the superspecialized—the doctors on whom the rest of us depend: "Specialization in medicine confers a false sense of certainty." *How Doctors Think* helped me understand my own thought processes and my colleagues'—even as it left me chastened and dazzled by turns. Every reflective doctor will learn from this book—and every prospective patient will find thoughtful advice for communicating successfully in the medical setting and getting better care.Many of the physicians Dr. Groopman writes about are visionaries and heroes; their diagnostic and therapeutic triumphs are astounding. And these are the doctors who are, like the author, willing to anatomize their own serious errors. This passionate honesty gives the book an immediacy and an eloquence that will resonate with anyone interested in medicine, science or the cruel beauties of those human endeavors which engage mortal stakes. *(Mar. 19)Klass is professor of journalism and pediatrics at NYU. Her most recent book is* Every Mother Is a Daughter, *with Sheila Solomon Klass.*
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From Bookmarks Magazine
Jerome Groopman, Harvard professor of medicine, AIDS and cancer researcher, and *New Yorker* staff writer in medicine and biology, isn't new to the popular medical-writing scene. Before *How Doctors Think*, he penned three other books—*The Anatomy of Hope*, *Second Opinions*, and *The Measure of Our Days*—that explore the role of art in the hard science of medicine. Here, Groopman's readable prose emphasizes the human element, the give-and-take so important to successful diagnosis and treatment. One critic, however, compares the book's medical pyrotechnics to an episode of the medical show *House*, while another takes issue with the author's stance against Big Pharma. For the most part, critics see Groopman's latest effort as a compelling meditation on the interactions between doctors and patients—an effort reminding us that mistakes and miscommunications can be minimized but not eliminated.

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From Booklist
By far the largest number of examples *New Yorker* staff writer and Harvard physician Groopman adduces to show how doctors think shows them thinking well for the good of their patients. In the initial example, one doctor seen by a woman with a long-standing weight-loss condition concedes being stumped and sends her to a specialist who finds the cause of her woes and, most probably, saves her from an early death. Both physicians are praiseworthy, the second more than the first only because he believed a patient whom others had come to pooh-pooh as a complainer and then thought of examining for something that the others had missed. The lesson? A doctor has to think with the patient, not despite or against her or from an assumption of superior knowledge. Subsequent chapters show doctors thinking in resistance to economic pressure by hospitals and insurers, in thorough solidarity with parents about their children's care, against a host of professional assumptions and in resistance to pestering by drug companies--all to help patients achieve their own goals as far as possible. An epilogue suggests a few questions patients should ask to help their doctors think clearly and, as the last chapter's title puts it, "In Service of the Soul." A book to restore faith in an often-resented profession, well enough written to warrant its quarter-million-copy first printing. *Ray Olson*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Angela Dreiling:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a guide. Beside you can solve your condition; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled How Doctors Think. Try to the actual book How Doctors Think as your buddy. It means that it can being your friend when you really feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortuned for you. The book makes you far more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , let's make new experience as well as knowledge with this book.

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Effie Morris:

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