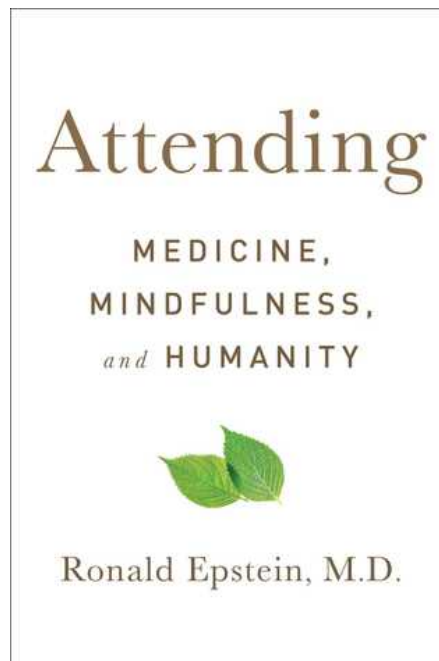




Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity

Ronald Epstein

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Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity Ronald Epstein

The first book for the general public about mindfulness and medical practice, a groundbreaking, intimate exploration of how doctors think and what matters most—safe, effective, patient-centered, compassionate care—from the foremost expert in the field.

As a third-year Harvard Medical School student doing a clinical rotation in surgery, Ronald Epstein watched an error unfold: an experienced surgeon failed to notice his patient's kidney turning an ominous shade of blue. In that same rotation, Epstein was awestruck by another surgeon's ability to avert an impending disaster, slowing down from autopilot to intentionality. The difference between these two doctors left a lasting impression on Epstein and set the stage for his life's work—to identify the qualities and habits that distinguish masterful doctors from those who are merely competent. The secret, he learned, was mindfulness.

In *Attending*, his first book, Dr. Epstein builds on his world-renowned, innovative programs in mindful practice and uses gripping and deeply human clinical stories to give patients a language to describe what they value most in health care and to outline a road map for doctors and other health care professionals to refocus their approach to medicine. Drawing on his clinical experiences and current research, and exploring four foundations of mindfulness—Attention, Curiosity, Beginner's Mind, and Presence—Dr. Epstein introduces a revolutionary concept: by looking inward, health care practitioners can grow their capacity to provide high-quality care and the resilience to be there when their patients need them.

The commodification of health care has shifted doctors' focus away from the healing of patients to the bottom line. Clinician burnout is at an all-time high. *Attending* is the antidote. With compassion and intelligence, Epstein offers a crucial, timely book that shows us how we can restore humanity to medicine, guides us toward a better overall quality of care, and reminds us of what matters most.

Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity Details

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Author : Ronald Epstein

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From Reader Review Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity for online ebook

Kelli Roberts says

I was drawn to this book because I'd finally found a physician who is conscious about connecting with her patients, and spends enough quality time to get to the root of a problem. I came across this book and was intrigued to find out the reality for most doctors. This is a thought-provoking, fact-filled look at the current state of the medical profession. It carefully lays out the issues that doctors face, along with effective ways to move toward a more fulfilling practice, both for the physicians and their patients.

Bill Long says

Okay, as far as a literary work, it is probably a 3.5 on this scale, but I rated it a 5 because of the importance of the message in this book and Dr. Epstein's ability to get this point across.

As I was reading this book, my mother became ill and was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer and had a very quick decline and death. I was able to see firsthand all of the problems that Dr. Epstein describes, and through the hospice care physicians, I was able to see the positive aspects he reported.

As a physician myself, I see great value in this book, and I believe that the tools described here are essential to TRUE health care reform, and I am inspired to act and help bring about this change in any way I can.

Jeannette Mazur says

Blergh...I really wanted to like this, but when the author started talking about his time at a zen center, I realized this wasn't going to be sciencey enough for me. Way to hippy dippy. I didn't finish it, and I think that was a great call. 0/10

Rhonda Sue says

I really enjoyed this book even though it's targeted for doctors and clinicians. The book moves along and isn't too medical lingo centric which is nice for the laymen. The mindfulness concepts can be applied by everyone in whatever field or domain you find yourself. If you're into meditation and breathworks, much of this should be familiar to you.

You will learn about Dr. Epstein's experience as a medical professional and as a patient and the examples in the book are all very relatable. Brain science is included of course and you'll get to neuroplasticity on page 177, if that's your thing.

Being mindful is an experience. One must be present, curious, engaged, and attentive. The author takes you chapter by chapter through these concepts. Burnout is discussed in chapter 10. How to become mindful is discussed in chapter 11. There is a short ending chapter on mindful healthcare organizations. To learn more about how to actually practice mindfulness, I would suggest checking out videos online. If you live in California, you have an advantage as this stuff is everywhere! Further reading is required on this topic or

actually taking a mindfulness class or two to learn how to meditate if you've never done so!

Brennan says

The timing of this book was amazing. I was just beginning a new collaboration with the UCI Medical School - developing and teaching a 12 week class on mindfulness, wellness, and resilience to OB/GYN residents. This book came out the week we began the program, and it is the first book written for physicians that deals with this topic.

Epstein is in family practice and highlights the needs for doctors to increase their own levels of mindfulness in an effort to improve patient care and reduce physician burnout. I am so excited that mindfulness is now making its way into medicine - quite a wonderful thing to bring a more holistic philosophy into the more traditional models of the western medicine.

Sharon says

Scribner and NetGalley provided me with an electronic copy of *Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity*. I was under no obligation to review this book and my opinion is freely given.

Attending is a book about mindfulness and medicine, changing the way that physicians think in order to provide more compassion to their patients. As health care has been more about the groundbreaking technologies than humanity, Dr. Epstein offers a way to improve the quality of care.

As a professor of Family Medicine, Psychiatry, and Oncology at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, Dr. Epstein directs mindful practice programs. He emphasizes the importance of attending - showing up, being present, and listening to patients. Self awareness on the part of the doctor is the key. Being able to listen to a diverse set of clues, in order to help the patient, is another. Curiosity is a skill that allows doctors an avenue through which they can engage with their patients. Applying Zen principles is an alternative, not only for physicians, but for patients as well, because achieving the emptiness of mind can provide the focus for the issue at hand.

Overall, *Attending* is a book that can provide useful information to medical professionals, patients, and their loved ones. Dr. Epstein gets to the heart of the matter clearly and concisely, with an honesty that is refreshing. I would recommend this book to both physicians and their patients, as I feel that all can learn valuable lessons from Dr. Ronald Epstein.

Sherry says

I listened to the audio version. I am a pharmacist and I am currently taking a course on integrative health self care. This book was very interesting to me because we are studying mindfulness. We are given an inside view of a doctor learning to be mindful with his patients and the impact. I also like seeing into the mind of a physician as he diagnoses and interacts with patients. Being present with a patient and clearly hearing their concerns is sometimes more beneficial than medicine or can at least give better outcomes.

Barbara (The Bibliophage) says

Attending isn't necessarily a book for everyone, but I appreciated many of the ideas Dr. Epstein puts forth. I think the primary audience is anyone in a health care provider, student, or administration role. However, as a massage therapist and patient I still found the ideas relevant and eye-opening.

First, I'll say that Attending rotates between being interesting and being a bit dull. It's certainly well researched, with about 35% of the book as footnotes and references.

Dr. Epstein clearly describes the components of being a mindful physician, as well as having a mindful medical practice. Those components are qualities that anyone in the health care field can incorporate into their interactions with both patients and colleagues.

This was the point in the book where I wished I knew doctors who practiced this way. And then I considered buying copies of the book for all of the physicians I see regularly. And reading it out loud to them!

After describing the ideals of Attending, Dr. Epstein explains the reality physicians face every day. With electronic health records and productivity quotas, the structure of health care today doesn't automatically encourage a mindful approach. But that's why mindful, compassionate, and curious practices matter more than ever. Epstein makes a strong case for this approach as a method to help prevent and / or fix physician burnout.

After reading about the realities of a doctor's life, I expect to be a more compassionate and understanding patient as well. Plus, I think the Attending approach should be taught at all medical schools and conferences. It sounds like it can save the lives of patients and physicians!

Thanks to NetGalley, Scribner, and the author for a digital review copy in exchange for this honest review.

Olga Miret says

A must read for doctors, care professionals and health and social care institutions. And anybody else Thanks to Net Galley and to Scribner for providing me with an ARC copy of this book that I freely chose to review. If they asked me to provide a single word review of this book, I would write AMEN.

Ronald Epstein, the author and practising doctor with his own clinic, after years of studying a variety of disciplines (including music, meditation, Philosophy, Zen, Medicine...) and of trying to find the best way to maintain a practice sensitive to the needs of patients, compassionate, focused on well-being and avoiding suffering, rather than on billing, money and the business-side of things, published an article called 'Mindful Practice' in 1999. The article was very well received and resulted in the author becoming a speaker and offering training to other health professionals, emphasising the important of being mindful of one's practice. In this book, the author shares his insight and knowledge to help other physicians avoid errors, burnout, and remember what Medicine should really be about. He offers plenty of background research and information (with abundant notes that take up more than a third of the book and a useful bibliography for those who want to check the original sources) interspersed with case stories that illustrate the topics. These include cases Dr Epstein had personal experience of (both as a physician and as a patient) and others that he's accumulated over years of educating other professionals and talking to friends and colleagues. These cases not only reinforce the theoretical points but also add a practical and personal touch that can be lost in purely theoretical texts.

The book is written in a fluid and clear style, accessible and interesting also to those who might not work in healthcare, although it is particularly geared towards health professionals. Due to the themes and subjects

touched upon, this book would be useful to individuals and institutions heavily invested in helping people and dealing with the public, in particular, those offering care. Although many of the reflections are particularly pertinent to individuals, the emphasis on education and the fact that many of the qualities discussed, like compassion and resilience can be taught, are particularly important for organisations and institutions that manage human resources. As Dr Epstein explains, they would go a long way to help avoid professional burnout.

Although Attending mentions Zen, neurocognitive studies, philosophers' books, mindfulness and meditation, the overall message does not require an in-depth knowledge of any of those subjects and I cannot imagine anybody who would not find something useful in this volume.

As a doctor and one who left the job a few years back less than enamoured with the way health care is organised, I kept nodding all the way through. I highlighted so many sentences and quotes that I cannot share them all, but I will choose a few ones that I felt were particularly pertinent:

Medicine is in crisis. Physicians and patients are disillusioned, frustrated by the fragmentation of the health care system. Patients cannot help but notice that I spend more and more time looking at computer screens and less time face-to-face. They experience the consequences of the commodification of medicine that has forced clinicians' focus from the healing of patients to the mechanics of health care —productivity pressures, insurance regulations, actuarial tasks, and demoralizing metrics that measure what can be counted and not what really counts, sometimes ironically in the name of evidence-based and patient-centered care.

Maslach found that burnout consisted of three factors: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation (treating people as objects), and a feeling of low personal accomplishment.

But now, in the age of the corporatization and widgetization of medicine, there is a new kind of burnout, a slow, relentless "deterioration of values, dignity, spirit and will" that comes from the structure of health care itself.

The problem is not only overwork; it's a crisis of meaning, resilience, and community.

As I said, I think this book should be required reading for medical students, qualified doctors and also for other professionals working in healthcare and those who manage staff and organise the educational programmes of institutions, not only those providing healthcare but also any that deal with the public and its problems on a regular basis.

If I were to make a suggestion, it would be that the book could easily be made even more relevant to other disciplines by adding examples pertaining to other professions (not only nurses or paramedics but also social workers, counsellors, teachers...). It is clear from the content that although the principles can be applied individually, organisations would also do well adopting the ideals and attitudes highlighted by the research. Becoming attentive, compassionate, curious and mindful would help patients and staff increase their wellbeing and avoid burnout and complaints.

I recommend this book to all healthcare professionals, and those interested in how to improve healthcare and increase the resilience and wellbeing of staff. I think that anybody could potentially benefit from this book, and I'd recommend checking the sample if you think it might help you. I will definitely recommend it to some of my previous work colleagues.

Maddy Russell says

This book tackles important questions within medicine that have often been left by the wayside. At times, the author's voice may seem a little distracted and repetitive, but this comes from his persistent attempt to convince others of the real impact that mindfulness, a somewhat intangible concept (especially to a reader with little experience), has on the day-to-day life of not just medicine and healthcare, but many service industries.

Tom says

Mindfulness has become so common in public discourse, that it suffers from overuse. Epstein has been publishing articles about mindfulness and medicine for many years and has nicely brought many threads together in this book.

It is hard to discern the intended audience at times. The public will find it of interest to consider the advantages of physicians who incorporate mindfulness in their medical practice. Physicians will reflect on the importance of its message to both their patients and themselves.

The term work-life balance is common in medical (and other) circles currently and Epstein points out the problems with this trope. conceiving of everything outside work as life and that one needs to balance these activities, implies that when you are at work, you're not fully alive. If you are unhappy at work, then, you place the source at things external to yourself...your work environment. Feeling unable to change the larger system leads to retreating more and more into non-work or life. In medicine, this ignores the deeper rewards, the life, of the work involved. This division between 'work' and 'life' lies at the source of much burn out in the profession.

The book is written in a conversational way (what Pinker, in his book *The Sense of Style*: the thinking person's guide to writing in the 21st century, calls the classical style), which makes it easy to read. The drawback to this is that many of the sources referred to in the book are found in endnotes. My preference would be footnotes.

Viviane Crystal says

What is medical practice like when a physician takes the time to tune into the patient, to find out what is going on in mind, body and spirit? Does a different diagnosis emerge from such sensitivity? Does the physician experience less stress in a system that is fraught with demands for quality performance at the least possible cost? Is this type of change necessary when physicians are so trained to churn out diagnoses from lists of diagnostic symptoms and formulas for treatment?

Dr. Ronald Epstein attempts to answer these and other questions. His central thesis is that doctors who practice mindfulness as part of their practice are less stressed, more effective and more human, like their patients.

Dr. Epstein describes his experience as a third-year Harvard Medical School student as he watched a surgeon operating on one kidney totally ignore that the other kidney was turning purple and looking engorged with blood. While that other kidney was within the surgeon's field of vision, it had no primary concern or focus. The field was narrow but the surgeon's focus was narrower. It may not seem like a big deal but it could have had fatal consequences.

Perhaps you've heard a patient cite symptoms, feelings and questions in one long speech upon first entering a doctor's office. How does the doctor handle that barrage and how many items can the physician handle? What can be ignored out of that list and should it be ignored? Dr. Epstein handles this answer without condemning doctor or patient and instead focusing on techniques of mindfulness that mean a doctor is more sensitive to everything coming into his medical surround.

Mindfulness is enhanced with compassion and a state of constant curiosity on the part of the physician. Numerous medical anecdotes fill the pages as we learn about some of the components of mindfulness. The stories keep it all interesting as there is a bit much of repetition – perhaps a necessary mode as some may be tempted to pass over these elements of “how” to learn mindfulness and practice the same with patients. All in all, this is an interesting text for those who are teachers, students, practitioners, or administrators in medicine. Certainly, Dr. Epstein presents a model of medicine that will fascinate both practitioners and

patients. Nicely done, Dr. Ronald Epstein!

Nancy says

I'm not a physician but as a patient, I was interested in reading this book. I am not disappointed. From this book I appreciate doctors more & want to thank my doctors who are present & attentive when treating me. As a volunteer with hospice, this book taught me how to be more attentive & companionate to patients, their families, and others.

Although written for those in the medical field, I recommend this book to all who interact with people on a daily basis. In other words, everyone who is not a hermit.

Arnold P. says

Dr. Ronald Epstein's recently published book Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity is among the best books about how to teach the humanistic aspects of doctoring. Epstein weaves together an insightful collection of experiences that examine the clinician's situation starting from inside her own mind and ending at the system in which she practices.

"Attending" is both a term for the senior physician on a care team as well as a state of attentiveness. Both definitions are important here – the book draws from theories of mindfulness, which Epstein brought to the attention of medical practitioners in a 1999 JAMA article. This book explains the difference between being attentive and being present and how both are involved in the makings of an excellent physician. Epstein also explores more abstract concepts like curiosity and intuition, explaining with engaging examples how these characteristics are invaluable to the best clinicians.

The book reads like an eloquent explanation of the modern challenges to good doctoring. He addresses a variety of issues, from the breakdowns in communication between physician and patient to the challenges of providing empathic care in systems that are built for financial optimization rather than for healing. He also addresses important contemporary topics such as burnout and medical errors, devoting careful thought to these hotly debated problems.

Epstein does not just explain the relevant issues; he also writes about ways these problems can be curtailed or avoided. He uses anecdotes from his own experience in medical school and training as well as experiences and lessons he has learned about from colleagues, friends, and patients. He draws also from his extensive reading, including quotes and concepts from various scholars, including the philosopher Michel Foucault and the poet Jalal ad-Din Rumi. The result is an enjoyable amalgamation of human experience, applied to the complicated challenges faced by humanistic clinicians in today's era of healthcare.

Epstein highlights the importance of a sound mind throughout the book. He explains many aspects of mindfulness practice, citing specific characteristics that can be improved using mindfulness techniques. He also provides an opportunity for clinicians and other healthcare providers to sharpen these skills by teaching specific exercises in the book.

Written by an engaging communicator, Attending is an enjoyable foray into the mind of someone who has

carefully considered the challenges to today's practice of medicine. Epstein provides thoughtful replies to a variety of concepts using compelling narrative and engaging anecdotes. This book is an important read for anyone who wants to critically engage with the humanistic practice of medicine.

-Ali Rae, APGF Health Communications Fellow

Jae Werndli says

Really good read on mindfulness training and preventing burnout. While written about medicine, this would seem very applicable for those in the police force (where officers must make quick judgements in high stress situations) and teaching. Highly recommend this read!
