

Healing Through Empathy: An Expanded Edition

Francis V. Adams

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Patients trust a physician who listens to their problems and shows concern for their well-being. Such traits of human kindness should be fundamental to every doctor's professional persona. Yet many assume a brusque, business-like manner with their patients, in an effort to be objective and avoid personal involvement. Present-day doctors may be highly trained and skilled in their specialties, but an impersonal demeanor doesn't offer comfort to patients.

Francis V. Adams, MD, believes that a more empathetic approach can positively impact a patient's ability to heal. As a pulmonologist in private practice, he became convinced that this idea worked during years of treating patients. The son of a doctor, Adams received his medical training at Cornell University Medical College. Named among the best doctors in metropolitan New York City on several occasions, he has written sourcebooks about asthma and breathing disorders, and hosts a weekly doctors radio program. An assistant professor of clinical medicine at New York University (NYU), he also serves as surgeon for the New York police department.

In *Healing Through Empathy*, Adams presents case studies that demonstrate how patients react to empathetic treatment. He describes their physical symptoms and mental attitude when diagnosed, explains disease causes and prognoses, and chronicles progress as patients adapt to the difficult realities of their condition. These case studies show that people who maintain a positive attitude and respond to the encouragement of a caring physician, experience greater peace of mind, no matter the outcome.

One of Adams' patients received a diagnosis of lung cancer at the age of thirty-six and endured punishing radiation and multiple surgeries. During the years of his remission, Kevin counseled other people with the disease. He told Adams, "My main message is what you taught me—don't give up, always get another opinion, and keep fighting."

Physicians face their own challenges when treating patients empathetically. "Though I have had this type of conversation with patients and their families countless times, it is never easy for me to discuss the consequences of a serious illness and end of life issues," Adams says.

When he teaches medical students at NYU, Adams helps them develop the listening skills necessary for empathetic healing. He tells of a patient who said that the doctors who treated her deceased husband considered him more an interesting disease than a real person. Incorporating this story into his class lecture, he says, "I told my students that I wanted them to meet the person inside their patients."

The author's straightforward writing style and personal warmth allow lay readers to easily absorb this book's message. In accessible language, Adams details the fine points of how lung diseases progress and the ways in which the human body reacts physically. Final editing failed to catch some typographical errors.

This book will be welcomed by those who seek more personalized health care, for loved ones or themselves, in times of serious illness. New doctors would benefit from reading it before they begin medical practice.

MARGARET CULLISON (December 3, 2010)

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