

My Brain Is Out of Control

Patrick Mbaya

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My Brain Is Out of Control is a brief memoir with humor, heart, and pertinent advice.

Patrick Mbaya's unusual memoir, *My Brain Is Out of Control*, approaches neurological and psychiatric issues from a different perspective: that of a psychiatrist himself. This is an eye-opening and humorous account of being on the other side of the couch.

The author has unique insights into his health concerns, particularly when he realizes he is suffering from depression, the very illness he treated in his own practice and frequently spoke about as an expert. Though an extremely brief essay form makes the book feel topically unfocused and the tone is almost clinical, the heart of the work, and the author's endearingly corny sense of humor, shines through.

Despite the obvious difficulties Mbaya suffers as he battles the mysterious side effects of cerebral abscesses, depression, hepatitis, and other health issues, he expresses appreciation for his new awareness of what patients deal with every day.

During an extended hospital stay, the psychiatrist-turned-patient learned to find happiness and health benefits from simple, personal things that made him feel human, like having a Snickers bar or listening to music in a garden. Such anecdotes aren't just about telling his story; they also offer tips from a professional and personal point of view.

The book demonstrates the importance of empathy in the sometimes impersonal field of health care. At the onset of Mbaya's symptoms, there was much difficulty in coming to a diagnosis. When the team testing him prickled and judged him over an HIV test (the results of which were negative), Mbaya realized that even his own profession was not above insensitivity and prejudice.

He expresses similar fury when his doctor is giddy at the possibility that his brain condition could be highly unusual. Such moments are poignant reminders of the importance of awareness. While Mbaya's family played a huge role in helping him overcome his illness—from driving him around to offering moral support—the book mostly focuses on his firsthand experiences.

The tone of this inspirational story remains clinical and dry, with diagrams and charts illustrating what was going wrong with Mbaya's brain, and long passages spent detailing medications and symptoms. For such a short book, the work has trouble pinning down an overarching purpose beyond its analytical account of Mbaya's medical treatment.

Moments of humor are charming. Mbaya reveals that when he regained his speech, which had been hindered by his abscesses, he was shocked to find that he spoke with a Russian accent, despite never having been to the country.

This memoir is not quite a self-help book, but some of its tips are widely applicable, like eating a banana every day to help with depression, or “chas[ing] dopamine” by exercising in the morning. Others are more humorous and specific to Mbaya’s preferences, like eating Nando’s to give him energy to speak.

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PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (May 22, 2017)

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