



In Shock: My Journey from Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope

Rana Awdish

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A first-person account from a young critical care physician describes how toward the end of her medical training she suddenly became a patient fighting for her own life, revealing how her experiences exposed her to flaws in today's care standards and how to better embrace the emotional bond between doctor and patient.

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A riveting first-hand account of a physician who's suddenly a dying patient and her revelation of the horribly misguided standard of care in the medical world

Dr. Rana Awdish never imagined that an emergency trip to the hospital would result in hemorrhaging nearly all of her blood volume and losing her unborn first child. But after her first visit, Dr. Awdish spent months fighting for her life, enduring consecutive major surgeries and experiencing multiple overlapping organ failures. At each step of the recovery process, Awdish was faced with something even more unexpected: repeated cavalier behavior from her fellow physicians—indifference following human loss, disregard for anguish and suffering, and an exacting emotional distance.

Hauntingly perceptive and beautifully written, *In Shock* allows the reader to transform alongside Awdish and watch what she discovers in our carefully-cultivated, yet often misguided, standard of care. Awdish comes to understand the fatal flaws in her profession and in her own past actions as a physician while achieving, through unflinching presence, a crystalline vision of a new and better possibility for us all.

As Dr. Awdish finds herself up against the same self-protective partitions she was trained to construct as a medical student and physician, she artfully illuminates the dysfunction of disconnection. Shatteringly personal, and yet wholly universal, she offers a brave road map for anyone navigating illness while presenting physicians with a new paradigm and rationale for embracing the emotional bond between doctor and patient.

In Shock: My Journey from Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope **Details**

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Laura says

This was a beautifully poetic memoir chronicling a doctors journey to the brink of death. I initially believed this to be some kind of quasi religious epiphany but in actual fact the authors spirituality is not the focal point of her book.

I found this memoir so difficult to put down and caught myself thinking of it even when I wasn't reading. The author highlights the difficult transition from doctor to patient and how she comes to realise that even the smallest interactions leave a lasting impression on those under her care. Seeing first hand what her patients go through is her greatest lesson and something which she acknowledges could never be taught in medical school.

The overall message of this book is communication and how it impacts on the patient experience. I loved how the author unashamedly details her own weaknesses as a medic and how her experiences influenced her practice since. Her own tragic story is enough to make anyone grateful for their health and examine their own mortality.

A pretty much flawless read for those interested in modern medicine and the American health service.

Michelle Neely lalonde says

Pulled in from page one and unable to put it down! Dr. Awdish takes you on this very scary medical journey with her, reliving the days leading up to, during and after an illness she is more than lucky to have survived. You will feel like you were alongside her the entire time as each unbelievable event occurred, one right after the other. She is painfully honest and open about all that she endured and doesn't hold back on what she was thinking of herself, her fears, her pain and the people around her. She does so with such humility and honesty, and not from a place of anger, which would be entirely understandable considering the circumstances. Instead she dissects each component of what happened from a place of understanding why and how the things that happened to her did. It's this special understanding she has of medicine, of science, of people and of suffering that makes this a must read. If you've ever been a patient, a family member of a patient or if you are in the medical field in any capacity, you need to read this book. It will forever change the dialogue you have with someone who is sick or in pain or just going through something hard. You will want to be more empathetic and share in their suffering. "Dump out". At the end, I was left feeling in awe. I'm so amazed at the ability of Dr. Awdish to take this terrible, horrible, life threatening experience and turn it into something so beautiful and inspiring. It's incomprehensible to think this actually happened in real life, yet Dr. Awdish survived and is able to share this story with her audience. Thank you Dr. Awdish for being brave even if you didn't feel like you were and for the work you are doing now to forever change the way physicians are taught to communicate with patients, not only for the sake of patients, but for the sake of the physician. You are truly amazing!

Full disclosure, I know Rana because I work with her husband, Randy. Who is truly the unsung hero in this story by the way, never once giving up and never leaving her side. Ok, don't tell him I said that! Even knowing in advance a little of what the story was about and a little bit of what happened to Rana, I never

could have fully comprehended the real life nightmare Rana and Randy lived through without reading this book. Knowing them does not change or alter my feelings about this book. I can honestly say it was so much better than I was even expecting. That's the truth.

Rana, I'm so happy you are well and that you and Randy have each other. You two make an amazing team and than there's that Walt fella. I expect nothing but amazing things from Walt with you two guiding him along the way! Can't wait for the next magic show! :)

A Sanchez says

Have you ever read a book where you didn't want to stop because the story was so compelling you needed to know everything that happened next, but at the same time you didn't want it to end because you wanted to savor every single word?

Well that is how I felt reading Dr. Rana Awdish's memoir In Shock.

As a physician and a mother I felt a deep connection with her story. Thankfully I never had any such complications, and I have not suffered such a devastating loss and illness, but with pregnancy there are always possibilities of complications that can lead to tragic losses.

The change in her view of her role in healthcare came from becoming a patient herself, and doing a lot of reflection on what her role as a physician was and now is. Her tragic loss transformed her in ways all the education of medical school, residency and fellowship couldn't. She reflects on how much good we could do as physicians and health care providers if we all were taught to empathize with patients more, to deal with disease and suffering of the person, and not as the disease entity by itself, and if we developed healthy ways to deal with and share our emotions of the very difficult cases we encounter all too often. I believe change is possible, but each one of us has to do some reflection and start making changes. I believe a lot of good will come from what Dr. Awdish is now teaching, even if it came from a place of suffering and loss. I believe this is a book for everyone in healthcare, so we can learn that we do not have to keep on running through the motions like we were taught, we can change for the better.

Some of my favorite phrases of the book:

- "Regardless of how I looked from the outside, or how weak and helpless I felt, he saw through to a core of fiery, molten strength. When I saw myself reflected back the way he saw me, I wanted to be more like that person. That person was resilient and was clearly going to recover".
- "But allowing ego to dominate, coddling it as a mechanism of self-protection, is nothing more than allowing weakness to masquerade as strength".
- "What if hope was the way to face and plan for a admittedly uncertain future?".
- "It was not lost on me that my true education had begun the moment I had gotten sick, and it would likely continue for years to come".
- "Emotions demand to be acknowledged and appeased before it will disengage its controlling grip on the higher centers of cognition".
- "Not knowing what to do with my feelings, I built a tower in honor of my patient inside of me, stacking failure upon shame onto blocks of grief and blame".
- "Loving each other through the darkness is the thing to look for and to mark. It's there, in the shadows,

where we find meaning and purpose".

- "How do we live in such a way that honors all aspects of knowledge? Not just medical knowledge, but the body's knowledge and the truths that can only be delivered through the patient's perspective, and our communal knowledge of suffering and identity? If each of those bits is a piece of the light, if each one is a spark, we could unite them to become whole".

Tammy says

Anytime I have an opportunity to read about someone else's experiences, whether good or bad, I know I am going to learn something; this was definitely the case with *In Shock*. While the subject matter may seem dark (and it is), the writing style helps to lighten the load as Awdish is, impressively, able to inject humor into even her darkest moments. Even while she chronicles some very traumatic experiences (loss of a child, critical illness) she does it so eloquently that you sometimes forget you're not reading a work of fiction.

In as much as *In Shock* is a manifesto to the medical community about the importance of seeing the big picture and treating patients as people, not diseases, it's NOT a medical book. More than anything, it reminds us of the importance of hope, the power of empathy, and the resilience of the human spirit. It's a true testament to the strength we have within that we sometimes don't even realize.

Incredibly, despite the depth of loss Awdish experiences, the tone isn't what you might expect. The reader is reminded that often, out of every truly horrendous experience, comes something positive... likely when we least expect it. Her message transcends the role of the physician, the patient, and even the medical community. At the end of the day, it reminds us that everyone has a story and sometimes we need to stop and listen.

Lane says

As a physician, this is the perfect reminder that what seems routine to us, is someone's very worst day. And we have the power to connect and offer more than just modern medicine. Another reminder of how important words are, and Dr. Awdish's words are amazing-powerful and haunting at the same time. This should be required reading in medical school!

Latonya Davis says

"Medicine cannot heal in a vacuum; it requires connection." ~Rana Awdish, MD

This book would not allow me to put it down! It is a memoir that will serve as a template for medical empathy and revising approaches and conversations had at patient bedsides. It reads as a "Do Better" manual for healthcare workers. It is a testament to true love and a hope for altruistic medical practice. Her descriptions were so visceral they left me altered. I feel as though I have done right by my patients as their primary nurse, but my practice will never be the same after reading this. Brava Dr. Awdish for not only surviving such a horrific ordeal, but coming out the other side changed for the better. I hope this book touches enough of us to change the face of medicine.

Kathleen Gray says

This is a book I wish physicians in training were given to read and to discuss. Awdish's tragedy- the loss of her child- is a teaching point for other physicians even as she is trying to process what has happened. Her illness and recovery are amazing; be aware that she does not spare us details of what are sometimes difficult medical and personal issues. If you've ever thought that doctors have it better when they are hospitalized or treated, this book will make you think again. The language is not poetic- it's straightforward and at times seems almost emotionless but at the same time, you always feel Awdish's beating heart. Her struggles and her relationship with her husband are documented in a way I've not read before in this type of memoir. Thanks to Netgalley for the ARC. Try this one if you are interested in well written memoirs, the state of health care, and as the title states- hope.

Rebecca Foster says

The doctor became the patient when Awdish, seven months pregnant, was rushed into emergency surgery with excruciating pain due to severe hemorrhaging into the space around her liver. Initially diagnosed as HELLP, an often fatal liver syndrome that affects 1% of pregnant woman, her condition was later explained by a ruptured liver tumor. Her unborn daughter didn't survive, and she nearly died herself. It was as if she was hovering in the upper corner of the operating room, watching her body being worked on, hearing colleagues yell things she'd uttered without a thought so many times: things like "*she's been trying to die on us*," "*she's circling the drain here*," "*we're losing her*."

Over the years of her recovery, which involved multiple further procedures as she tried to get well enough to bear another child, Awdish's whole perspective on medical care changed. Having experienced brusque, cursory treatment, even from colleagues at her Detroit-area hospital, she was convinced that doctors needed to do better, to truly listen to their patients' stories and fears – not so they could fill out the necessary forms and move on, but so that their decisions could be "built on empathy and a patient-centered narrative." Trust and honesty are more important than efficiency, she argues. This memoir is a gripping story of her own medical journey and a fervent plea for compassion from medical professionals.

Cara says

It's not just hope that propels this memoir. I agree with the subtitle that its redemptive power surges through this story, offering a vital trajectory that both physician and patient can traverse together. But you don't get to that redemption without trudging through murkier waters, and Dr. Awdish deftly steers readers—patients, doctors, caregivers ... all of us—through that journey. She unflinchingly approaches shame and guilt and feelings of worthlessness. When she describes how doctors are trained to detach, I am not a doctor, but I see myself. I see the walls I've constructed. Her observations cross boundaries. It's not just a doctor-patient bridge. It feels like a map to empathy, and its relevance extends far beyond the hospital walls.

Awdish's story evokes a symphony of emotion and revelation. It has harrowing movements involving the death of her baby. There are movements that weep: as she confronts a mirror for the first time, as she recalls

tragedies during medical school. Some movements dance alongside her husband's loving devotion and her tender interactions with her son. Some sway with laughter, her sharp wit punctuating many a passage. Many movements scream "how." How could anyone say that to you? How could this be happening to you? Again? How are you alive?

One of this memoir's biggest successes is that you understand how, even though you're screaming alongside her. Many of us have been patients whose symptoms or conditions didn't present to a physician in an expected or welcome fashion. I once was told that I was the cause of "another gray hair." I didn't intend for that. I didn't want to cause someone fear. But now I understand what prompted that statement. And I hope my understanding is one stone in the path to healing not only the doctor-patient relationship, but our collective empathy deficit. From the "In Shock" introduction: "I didn't understand that open channels would replenish my supply of self. That there was reciprocity in empathy."

In full disclosure, I know Dr. Awdish personally and was honored to read an early manuscript. While of course I cannot be unbiased when discussing an amazing woman and writer, my review is honest. "In Shock" is such an important, timely, compelling work that I don't need to fret about my adoration. While I wish she didn't have to experience such horrors, I'm grateful Rana Awdish lived to share this insight and to push for us to achieve a higher level of healing.

Lita says

I was a little bit worried to pick up this book at first. I'm not big on non-fiction (I don't count scientific literature in this category), and I sometimes find it difficult to get to the end of non-fiction books. However, the topic was interesting, so I decided to give it a go. I have surprised myself by finishing it in just eight days. Most parts of this book read like a fiction akin to the medical TV shows - a patient with an impossible and usually fatal condition, residents and attendings struggling to keep her alive, family in distress, and so on. But it is not fiction, and a patient is a real person (the author who is also a doctor herself) outlining, explaining and analyzing her own experiences through the worst time of her life. For most parts, the book was almost a page-turner, for others, I felt my mind drifting off because I understood I'm not the target audience of the story. However, I genuinely hope that those who are (members of the medical community) will pick up this book and reflect back on their everyday practices when working with patients because most of us have no other choice but to rely on their competence and skills.

Marika says

One of the last things that Dr. Rana Awdish remembers hearing was "we're losing her." She was on the surgical table at the hospital where she worked, and had gone into multisystem organ failure. That she survived was a miracle, and her recovery was long, with many setbacks. She recounts her medical treatment from the standpoint of knowing how medicine should work and why it sometimes doesn't. She writes about the lack of empathy from clinicians, miscommunication among hospital staff and absolute failures. She is not bitter about her experience, instead she vowed to make a difference in how patients were treated. This is must-read for medical professionals and non-medical readers alike.

I read an advance review and was not compensated

Laura says

This book was incredible. Awdish was able to articulate so many things I've felt as a clinician who regularly delivers bad news and deals with the death of patients. The section on resilience made me cry with the relief that my feelings of shame and inadequacy are not uncommon. I'm going to try to get everyone I work with to read this.

Frosty61 says

This author's journey begins when she becomes a critically ill patient and gains a new perspective on how doctors are trained to do their jobs and the flaws in that education. The story is very readable despite the many medical terms and procedures described. The author's experiences are harrowing, but she describes them clearly, sometimes with humor and usually with words that a non-medical person can understand. How I wish more doctors would figure out what she figured out after she almost died - we all need compassion, empathy, and understanding; patients are people not just case numbers and diseases; doctors need to listen to their patients without judgement and put their egos aside in order to provide the best care possible. Kindness, communication and support can go a long way in helping patients on the road to healing and recovery and I applaud this author for her efforts to showcase these ideas.

Bookslut says

Some parts of this were very strong and compelling. The parts that I found most impactful were the instances when she was spoken to condescendingly by medical personnel, or when they would not listen to her. I find this routinely in my medical care and that of my children, and wish every doctor would read this book. Maybe, coming from another doctor, it would improve the system. Her story was very moving, though at times I thought it struggled with the chronology and simple conveyance issues--I'd read and reread, unsure of exactly what happened. The sections that waxed philosophical, which I suspect were the meat and purpose of her book, were unengaging and added a lot of drag to the pacing.

From a dead baby standpoint, which (of course) is why I read this, it was hard to feel a connection for much of the book. I was at first struck by her ice coldness--I think if you only read the first half of this book, you'd think the death of her baby barely bothered her. You later learn that she had a pretty big wall up, and there is a touching line midway through that I have to roughly paraphrase, since I have already returned it: 'That I had a lifetime to feel these things. That they could forgive me for not being able to feel everything all at once'. I worry, that if people don't read it all the way through, that it would give a pretty big misrepresentation of what infant loss is like, and with some authority, since she is a doctor. Throughout the book, the mentions of her lost daughter are very few, very reserved, very restrained, and coupled with her personality and sense of humor, are so subtle that I doubt someone who has not lost a baby would understand the profound nature of what she is telling us. **It is very understated, I guess is what I am trying to say, not because she feels so little, but because she feels so much.** My favorite, and the most relatable, section of the book, is when she is preparing for the birth of her second child, her rainbow baby. Because you are so unprepared to trust in the safe delivery of any baby after you lose one, a lot of dead baby parents just...don't prepare, when it comes to the next one. We found ourselves, just like she did, in the parking lot of BabiesRUs, eating Taco Bell and trying to make a list of essential baby care items with a week-old baby. That section of the book brilliantly evoked for me the terror, relief, and exhaustion of the weeks surrounding

Cal's delivery.

Sarah Ewald says

What happens when a doctor becomes the patient? Dr. Rana Awdish, at 27 weeks in her first pregnancy, experienced catastrophic hemorrhaging, and nearly died. In fact, she describes her 'out of body' experience during the surgery to save her, looking down at the scene. She even describes the intern sitting in the corner. She heard the words uttered by the surgeon. Fortunately she survived (her baby didn't), but not without complications that sent her back to the hospital in which she worked several times, before the tumors in her liver were discovered. She has harsh words for doctors and nurses who treated her while she was in a coma. She heard every word they said. At one time, she experienced symptoms of toxic shock, and tried to tell this to the doctor treating her in the ER. He refused to listen. She lost valuable time before her condition was recognized and she was treated with massive antibiotics in the ICU. She also describes her return to work treating patients in the very Intensive Care Unit in which she was a patient.

This book is an examination of the culture of doctors, and how they can treat patients better and with more empathy, rather than what is traditionally taught in medical school which is to detach from the patient and their own emotions. It is also a compelling story of courage and endurance in the face of physical challenges. She has since taken on the goal of improving communications skills between doctors and their patients. The addendum at the end of the book gives guidelines for doctors and patients on how both can communicate better when faced with health challenges. Thank you Dr. Awdish for your candor.
