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Family Medicine

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEW

Finding Meaning in Healthcare: Looking Through the Hermeneutic Window

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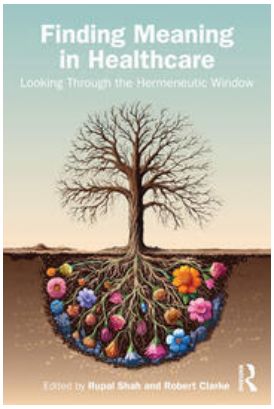
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Book Title: Finding Meaning in Healthcare: Looking Through the Hermeneutic Window

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Modern family medicine has evolved significantly over the past decade. With the introduction of electronic medical records (EMRs), the expansion of continuous, multichannel care, the rise of multidisciplinary teams, and the shift toward value-based care, many physicians feel caught between practicing medicine and the challenge of addressing every aspect of a patient's health within a limited 20 minute visit. *Finding Meaning in Healthcare: Looking Through the Hermeneutic Window* is a collection of essays by different authors that encourage clinicians to listen, assess, and interpret the patient narrative as essential to well-rounded care. This book aims to help family physicians understand and discuss concepts that all physicians acknowledge but rarely can find a way to practice or describe them.

Editors Rupal Shah and Robert Clarke, with backgrounds in both clinical practice and medical humanities, are well-positioned to review and address this topic. Their invaluable background helps the reader connect both concepts of philosophy and medicine without getting lost and discouraged due to a lack of understanding. The hermeneutic window is discussed as a concept for physicians to analyze encounters as more than just medicine and a patient's diagnosis. The authors encourage physicians to look and assess beyond the well-known clinical appointment to fully assess the patient as a whole person. This perspective builds on the already well-known patient-centered model of family medicine.

The book develops this concept through clinical examples, offering multiple perspectives that enhance both readability and relevance. However, the philosophical language and conceptual density can make the text difficult to follow, particularly for readers without a background in philosophy. Although the authors make a clear effort to connect theory to practice, busy physicians may struggle with the abstract language. The book would benefit from clearer, step-by-step applications that physicians could incorporate into everyday clinical work.

One of the book's strongest contributions is its reframing of clinical data. In family medicine, patients are cared for longitudinally and often present with multiple comorbidities. Understanding why a patient seeks care and how they interpret their illness can be just as important as objective findings. This idea builds on established work in medicine, particularly Rita Charon's emphasis on honoring patients stories,[1] and echoes George Engel's biopsychosocial model,[2] which challenged reductionist biomedical approaches decades ago.

Shah and Clarke extend these ideas by encouraging clinicians to actively engage with the patient during their interview and to find further meaning interwoven in their narrative. The hermeneutic window encourages physicians to ask, "What does this mean for the patient in this moment?" This approach is especially valuable in family medicine, where clinicians frequently encounter conditions without clear diagnoses or definitive treatments.

Despite these strengths, applying these concepts in real-world primary care remains challenging. Time constraints, productivity pressures, and EMR demands may limit a physician's ability to consistently adopt this open-minded mindset. Additionally, while the book explores philosophical applications in clinical care, it offers limited guidance

on how to teach these concepts to future physicians and learners in general. Future editions would benefit from including practical tools and educational strategies to support integration into both training and practice.

Within the broader literature, this book contributes to ongoing efforts to humanize health care by reinforcing the importance of viewing patients as whole individuals. However, it offers limited discussion on how physicians can manage the increased workload associated with this approach, particularly in the context of rising burnout. This gap is notable given frameworks such as the Quadruple Aim, which emphasizes improving physician well-being alongside patient care.[3]

Overall, *Finding Meaning in Healthcare* is an engaging and thought-provoking read for family physicians, educators, and students seeking to deepen their understanding of patient-centered care. Its philosophical focus makes it most suitable for readers with a strong interest in the intersection of medicine and the humanities.

For practicing family physicians, the book serves as a valuable reminder of how care should ideally be delivered and how they should engage with patients. At the same time, it highlights the challenges of implementing this approach within the modern health care system. Ultimately, the book offers a meaningful framework that can strengthen physician–patient relationships and support a more humanistic practice of medicine.

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