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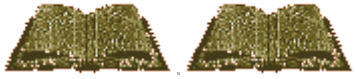 (N.B. Please increase your screen resolution to 1600 x 1200 dpi or more, for best viewing)

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HUMOR IN MEDICINE

From Voodoo to Viagra: The Magic of Medicine (37 Uplifting Essays from a Doctor's Bag of Tricks) *by* Oscar London, M.D., W.B.D.
Ten Speed Press, Celestial Arts, Tricycle Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, CA 94707. : : 138 Pages: Publication Date - 2001, ISBN 1-58008-287-4: Price $14.95

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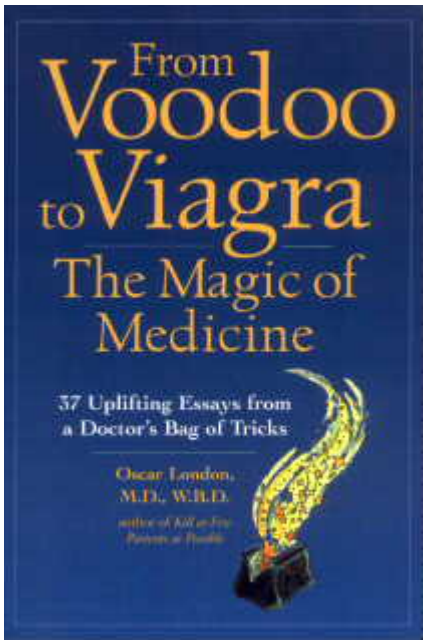


Medicine is such a hectic profession that its practitioners - doctors, surgeons, internists - hardly if ever get a time to laugh. Most of them are regarded as serious professionals who don't know how to laugh. The book under review - written by an internist - breaks this myth comprehensively. In 37 short essays - each of which can be read and enjoyed independently - range on all possible topics one can imagine. The author, a noted medical humorist, seems to have an opinion on almost any subject under the sun. Both doctors and the lay people can read and enjoy this book. In case you are wondering what kind of degree is W.B.D. (London loves to append this degree before his name), it is World's Best Doctor!

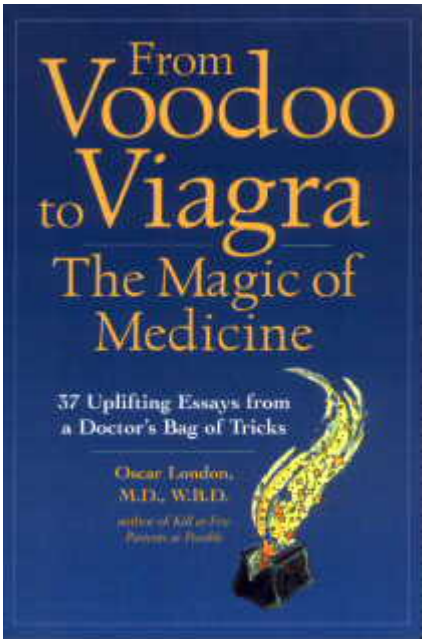
View this book on Amazon

When I picked up this book, I was feeling a bit gloomy. I opened the book at a random page, and started reading it lazily and almost absent mindedly. Within a few minutes, I started feeling better. I realized I had an extremely interesting book on hand. The essay that I happened to read first was on Krispy Kremes, a new chocolate doughnut that had hit the town. For almost two years Dr. London, the author, was thinking to have a bite, but the nearest joint delivering it was at Las Vegas, while our good doctor practiced in Berkeley, California. He had to resort to ingenious methods to prevent his urge from showing. At one place he writes:

In Berkeley, the Foodie Capital of the West, the word-of-mouth hype for this fabled confection has been so compelling that in recent months I've had to give myself atropine injections lest I drool in front of my patients. (page 5)

That is why when a Krispy Kreme franchise opened in Union City, California, just thirty miles from where he practiced, he wanted to make a "pilgrimage to Union City the following weekend". But newspapers reports of "mob violence and near-riots among wannabe customers stuck in endless lines" prevented him doing so. At last he asks his drug rep Hank, who is always eager to oblige, to get him a dozen warm Krispy Kremes from Union City. What happens? Is Hank, who always used to bring large cups of Starbuck's lattes and dozens of almond biscotti not only for London, but for his secretary and bookkeeper as well, able to oblige? Readers may want to find out in a very hilarious ending.

EXCERPTS



Oscar London is quite adept at puns and subtle humor. He often goes at length - in his own unique humorous way - to explain why he chose to be an internist. Here is what he has to say in his fifth essay entitled "*Surgeons and Hugh Hefner wear Pajamas all day, but surgeons have more fun*" (page 15):

During my internship I saw enough going on inside an operating room to drive me into the safer confines of an internist's office...The more vital the organ they specialize in, the more I hold the surgeon in awe. I prostrate myself before the brain surgeon. I merely nod to the prostrate surgeon.
London often quotes from other famous humorists and/or great men. This is what he has to say on page 16

I love what the British humorist Evelyn Waugh said when he learned that his good friend Randolph Churchill, the brilliant but vey difficult son of Winston, had a benign tumor removed from his lung:"Leave it to the surgeons to find the only thing that was benign in Randolph," observed Waugh, "and remove it."
Sometimes London can get downright crude and naughty. In the 32nd essay entitled *A Drug Drenched Weekend in Vegas*, he is trying to show how multibillion drug cartels try to influence medical practitioners to prescribe their products. This company invited 950 doctors and their spouses for a free weekend in an opulent hotel in Las Vegas. However to keep their moods elevated and receptive, they did their best to dissuade them from gambling. But they couldn't. Here is how he goes on at page 116

Despite the reps' heroic efforts they were not able to conceal the 120,000-squre-foot casino on the ground floor of the Venetian. In this vaulted, Vatican-sized enclosure, there is seating room at the slot machines and blackjack tables for 6,200 buttocks. That comes to slightly more than 200 square feet per buttocks, which should provide each guest with ample wiggle room no matter how much junk food they consume at the casino buffets.

London comments not only on subjects related to health, but on such diverse subjects as gambling, smoking, drug cartels, drug representatives, cat-doting couples, peculiarities of Italian women and Indian parking operators, alternative medicine, peculiarities of his patients and so on. Frequently he becomes surrealistic in his descriptions, as in 29th essay entitled "Voodoo Conversations with a Zombie". He goes to a bar called Vee Zee on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, and finds himself presented with voodoo tools - a pad of Post-its, a black ball point pen and a shot glass full of pins. He is supposed to draw his worst enemy on a paper and stick needles on to that shape. As he discovers later, the bar specialized in occult practices like voodooism and zombiesm (Vee Zee stands for voodooism and zombeism). Not being able to think up of any enemy, he draws a picture of himself and sticks pins. And after gulping a large drink, he finds himself talking to a twenty year old lad sitting beside him. The story ends on a surrealistic note, when he comes out of the bar, turns around and finds himself outside a parking garage on Bourbon Street. "What in hell happened to the Vee Zee bar?", he asks a traffic cop. "Oh, that was torn down about ten years ago to make room for the garage." Who was the lad he was talking to? Readers would enjoy discovering it in the essay.

London frequently dwells on the peculiar practices of his patients. He classifies his patients in seven typical personalities (the 31st essay, entitled "The Seven Habits of Highly Obnoxious Patients") and gives them representative names. Some examples would help the readers know what I am talking about. One typical patient is Sophia Logorrhea, a female patient who starts talking the moment he sees her and doesn't pause for a breath. A typical drool from her:

My postnasal drip got worse on your decongestants which made me so hyper all my back muscles tightened up so I took two ibuprofen like you said which lit up my heartburn like a bonfire and now I've got twenty Tums stacked up like poker chips in my esophagus and I feel awful all over and I have to baby-sit my granddaughter next weekend and let me show you her latest pictures, here, tell the truth, have you ever seen such a doll, and not to change the subject.. .. . (page 108-9)

Another typical patient is Jack Nazdak, who always has a cell phone glued to his ears talking to his brokers. Yet another is Janet Chondroitin, who believes in alternative medicine so much that she would rather go to her chiropractor, herbalist and naturopath and take St. John's Wort for her depression, tofu for her hot flashes, and *Gingko biloba* for her short term memory loss, than taking medicines prescribed by him. Mildred Ratched, yet another typical patient is 74 and tries to flirt with her doctor. She is as rough with his staff, as she is flirtatious with her doctor. When our good doctor requests her to distribute her courtesy more evenly, she immediately finds another doctor, and then "as a parting shot gives my staff hell for taking so long to send a copy of my records to her new doctor".

I can go on and on, but I will end with an interesting essay on the peculiar habits of Italian patients. In his 24th essay entitled "Two Ladies from Martinez" he describes how one of his Italian-American patients, Gabriella brings her two newly immigrant cousins Maria and Gina to him. Their complaints are shortness of breath, severe tiredness, depression and insomnia. This is how he describes his encounter with the first of them:

When I opened the door of the exam room to see Maria, the plainer of the two sisters, I was taken aback to find her sitting unselfconsciously nude on my exam table. She was covered only by a Kleenex, which she held to her right eye. When I suggested to Gabriella that Maria might be more comfortable and less chilled in one of my lovely paper gowns, Gabriella explained that this was the way doctors in

the old country preferred to examine their patients. "Well, when in Rome.. ." I said to myself, taking Maria's blood pressure. (page 83)

Then we get to read, how he discovers her mitral stenosis in an ingenious way. But he is disappointed not to be able to get to a diagnosis in the case of her cousin - the more curvaceous Gina. Sure enough, she too was waiting nude for him, and when he could not get to a diagnosis, he asks her to hop on one foot twenty-five times on the floor. This is because certain latent heart diseases can be detected after exercising the heart. This is what the good doctor has to say on page 85:

Under less clinical circumstances, the sight of this lovely unclad woman, rhythmically hopping on one slender foot would have riveted my male attention. Under the circumstances I couldn't wait for the twenty-fifth hop so I could listen again to her exercise-stimulated heart.

Want to read more of such stories? If yes, this book is for you. Fully recommended to all doctors as well as laymen. Medical and nursing students may find it especially hilarious as they will discover what is lying in wait for them.

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