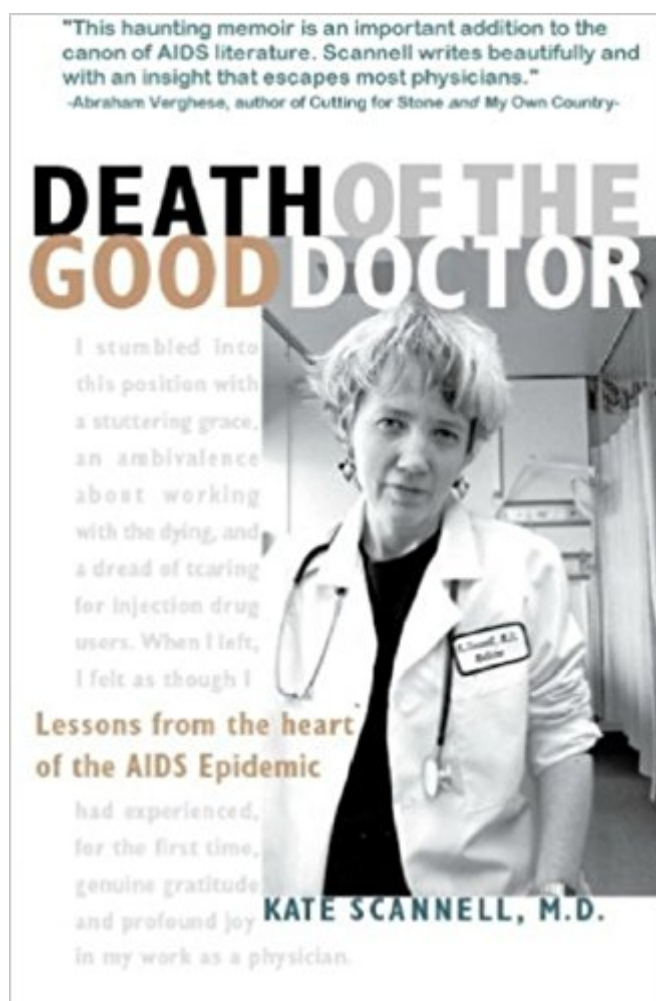


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# Death Of The Good Doctor -- Lessons From The Heart Of The AIDS Epidemic



## Synopsis

Doctor Kate Scannell abandoned her academic career in 1985 expecting to enter an "ordinary" medical practice in Northern California. Instead, the thirty-two-year-old physician found herself assigned to a county hospital AIDS ward where much of the medicine she has studied over many difficult years was rendered irrelevant. Working with AIDS patients, nearly all of whom are dying, Scannell discovers the inadequacy of the "good doctor" who battles illness to keep patients alive regardless of their suffering. By embracing her patients' unique needs and stories, Scannell reaches an expanded understanding of her patients and of herself as a physician. *DEATH OF THE GOOD DOCTOR* richly chronicles the intimacy of Scannell's relationships with her patients through whom the vast complexities of the AIDS epidemic are uniquely focused. It is through these beautiful, often difficult, and sometimes humorous portraits that the woman and the physician discover each other. \* This haunting memoir is an important addition to the canon of AIDS literature. Scannell writes beautifully and with an insight that escapes most physicians. --Abraham Verghese, author of *Cutting for Stone* \* Kate Scannell is the rare doctor who has been transformed by her patients. In this irresistible, informative, and enormously moving book, she tells us not only her own story, but theirs. --Gloria Steinem \* When Kate Scannell began work with AIDS patients in 1985, her idea of a good doctor was one who saved lives, not lost them, one who used state-of-the-art technological intervention to battle disease no matter what the cost. Now, in an enormously moving, thoughtful and compassionate memoir, she recounts how she discarded her traditional medical training and learned how to rely on her own sensibilities... The individuals that she met on the ward, she writes, "shook me, stunned me, alarmed me, twisted me, righted me, tricked me, and amazed me." Their stories do the same for us, and some even make us laugh. -- Minneapolis Star/Tribune Originally published in paperback, 1999 (Cleis Press). e-Published 2010 (Kindle). Back in print 2012 (CreateSpace).

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## Customer Reviews

An elegant and touching account of her tenure as clinical director of a county hospital's AIDS ward at the height of the epidemic (1985 to 1990), Kate Scannell's *Death of the Good Doctor* records her journey from the aggressive, invasive, never-say-die medicine that she had been trained to perform to a more compassionate, realistic practice in which she might be just as likely to prescribe fresh pastries or an outing as she would antibiotics or extensive laboratory tests. Structured around the stories of 11 of her most memorable patients, Scannell's narrative skillfully conjures the panic years of the AIDS crisis--political squabbles, public indifference, and the roller coaster of medical "breakthroughs" that proved dangerous or ineffective--always returning to the individual and the small acts of kindness that make a difference to the terminally ill. Her own recent diagnosis with cancer adds a poignancy to her reflections that is not lost on Scannell. Writing of AIDS years after leaving her post and returning to research, she explains that she is "moving between grief and acceptance of this disease": "After a dark period of responding to so much suffering and death with unmitigated grief and defiance, I have been able finally to find some peace, walking more comfortably, day-to-day, alongside the certainty of my own death." --Regina Marler --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

... [Scannell's] moving and beautifully written memoir...makes an important contribution to the early history of the epidemic, when medical authorities and politicians were still discussing quarantining people with AIDS and other prejudiced ideas. -- Book Marks, March, 2000 --...In *Death of the Good Doctor*, Scannell glides effortlessly from compassionate physician to skillful memoirist.... -- New York Blade, by Karen Mancuso. March, 2000. Kate Scannell is the rare doctor who has been transformed by her patients. In this irresistible, informative, and enormously moving book, she tells us not only her own story, but theirs. -- Gloria Steinem Most of the essays in this book transcend even the best of "Oprah's T.V. Book Moments." -- Lambda Book Report. May 2000. Page 27. Reviewed by Thom Nickels. This is one of the most startling and beautifully written books I've ever read from a doctor... -- By Pat Holt, NORTHERN CALIFORNIA INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION

As a retired health care professional, I misread the title "Death of the Good Doctor" to be about the changes in health care that I have mourned since their inception. Kate Scannell is a superb writer and a delightful human being as well. Her book reflects both. The stories of the men and women dealing with AIDS, this doctor, the patients, the family, two nurses, seemed so true and wise they were heart breaking and transformative. The gradual revelation of who she is, personally, fit perfectly and much like a mystery in a novel--this book is a page turner in the tradition of a novel that can hardly be put down, rendered all the more compelling in being about real people. Memory is usually softened by a need to feel good about ourselves. She has the gift that reminds me of Amy Quindlen, of a superb memory, having kept notes, and telling the truth as she sees it without embellishment to make herself the hero of the story. This book is worth reading for the storytelling, the truth, the history of a change in our culture, and the potential to have your heart broken open, the only upside I find in grief. Far from maudlin, more understated than exaggerated, her book is as good as it gets--the truth at last.

Dr. Kate Scannell's memoir of her work on the front lines of the early AIDS epidemic is touching and memorable. She details stories of individual AIDS patients and their stories. Having lost many friends to this disease, I re-lived some of those experiences. I only wish the book was longer. I hated to see the book end. It was that good.

I am a physician, and this book took me back to my early years when I encountered AIDS. More touchingly, I have a family member with some mental health issues and any time a certain sector of society is marginalized and not understood, there are painful moments of reaching towards being one's true self. Kate Scannel poetically takes us right to both a historical place in time, but another place as well. She transports the reader right to the pulse of life that is timeless...how to be one's true self in the face of societal adversity, and ignorance. The places where love flourishes, versus where fear rules instead. I thoroughly enjoyed the journey Dr Scannel took the reader on and the beautiful portraits she created of so many richly textured patients!

The author writes from a certain perspective. I was moved by the rejection patients endure from their own families. All people should be treated in a caring manner. God's job is to judge. People are not worthy.

Great book on the life of an AIDS doctor. Even a sweet twist at the end!!

Beautifully written and mesmerizing stories. It's extraordinary, and even reassuring, to read the reflections of a doctor who is so carefully aware of the human and spiritual depths of the doctor-patient relationship. It's unforgettable and shouldn't be missed.

Make no mistake: this book can be very tough sledding. Reading about the sad, often lonely, always uncomfortable deaths Scannell's patients suffered would be tough for any but the most hard-hearted reader to take. How could anyone not cry when reading about the dying man who wanted nothing more than to end his life in the midwestern home he grew up in, yet was forbidden to do so -- and therefore died alone, far away -- because his parents feared his son's illness would turn their small community against them? Yet it is against this backdrop of sadness and isolation that Scannell writes about her tender, compassionate, and often very creative ways of caring for her patients. Through her eyes we can see that, even when there is no hope of extending life, the lives of the dying can still be valued and enriched in the time they do still have. On a personal note, although I haven't lost nearly as many friends to HIV/AIDS in the last 20 years as some have, I have still attended far more than my share of memorial services and have said goodbye (or worse, not had the chance to say goodbye) to a handful of friends who I sometimes still cannot believe are really gone. I remember all too well the dark days Scannell writes about, and am grateful that advances in medicine since the mid-90s have helped reduce the terrible loss of human life. But the lessons Scannell offers are timeless and independent of person or illness. I don't recommend this book if you are currently coming to terms with a loss, because it may prove to be too painful. But if you are starting to lose your faith in mankind and need a dose of humanity, reading a few chapters of Scannell's book can offer a healthy reorientation.

This is one of the most touching, beautiful books I have ever read. Scannell shares her life with her readers and honors the memories of her AIDS patients through her series of "anecdotes." Each chapter is a different story, or memory, making it easy to read over a span of a week or more, or even in a day. In it, she touches upon a variety of issues like healthcare, sexuality, gender, death, family, and fear and she talks about her evolving from a good doctor (i.e. seeing the patient's physical needs) to a compassionate doctor (treating the patient holistically and considering their emotional needs). In the last chapter she reflects on her five years of experience on an AIDS ward and how it helps her cope with her discovery that she has cancer. When I read this book, I felt like she was next to me in person telling me these stories. I laughed; I got sad; I felt hopeful. This is a

testament to human life, and I would recommend this easy read to anyone.

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