

The Stethoscope & The Scalpel: Jimmy Mathew (ed)

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“The Stethoscope and the scalpel”, fascinating and insightful short stories from the world of medicine by Dr Jimmy Mathews is true to its name and provides insightful vignettes of the variegate life of a medico evolving through the medical educational establishment existing in Kerala at the turn of the century. It has the flavor and spice of a professional’s metamorphosis from laity to an established caregiver.

The author, with the “gift of the gab”, gives a vivid and professional description of important events from a medico’s perspective, more in the style of a personal diary. The initial chapters (first 8) relate to the experiences of a medical student and have a flavour of the adolescent ideologies, altruism, infatuations in variable measures. Chapters 9 to 13 relate to trials and tribulations of a medical intern and the exercise of choice. Chapters 14 to 17 give the veracity of a choice made. The maturity of a surgeon in the making is well described. The bitter sweet experiences of an alternative choice (in neurosurgery) and the rigors of residency are dealt with flair of subjectiveness and self aggression. The author comes into being as a plastic

surgeon with specialization in hand/micro vascular surgery in the subsequent chapters.

The writer has a flourish of pregnant pauses (on avenues of life’s lessons) and gives minute details of routine medical examination/procedures which make for very interesting and light reading. A wide spectrum of readers (from budding medical students to established medical practitioners and even nonmedical personnel) would find sections of the book to relate to personally. A combination of keen observation of life events and a deep reflection on them, in first person, gives it a personal touch.

Temporal evolutions of events necessitate a continuous reading through the chapters. Although the cover pages (front and back) depict physicians (probably with ER staff rushing) and a surgeon holding the scalpel (of occidental origin), the content/language and syntax are typically with an Indian and malayali flavor. A few typographical errors would no doubt be corrected by second edition.

All in all, the book spread over 28 Chapters costing Rs125 is an interesting and pleasant one time read giving insights into life from an evolving professional’s perspective.