

Our House: A Resident Perspective

SARAH DOTTERS-KATZ, MD

As a resident, I am always being encouraged to read more. Read this chapter. Read that journal article. Read the new practice bulletin. Rarely is there time to read for fun. Like potential space, the time for nonwork reading isn't there until you create it. When asked to review Kenneth Ludmerer's *Let Me Heal: The Opportunity to Preserve Excellence in American Medicine*, part of me rebelled: Why would I want to read more about medicine—isn't that what I eat, sleep, and breathe? However, the history major in me triumphed: Wouldn't it be interesting to learn about my roots, especially as I am personally transitioning from the completion of a graduate medical education program to a subspecialty training program?

I was not disappointed. Starting from the early eras of medicine in the United States, this book provides an in-depth chronicle of how residency evolved into what it is today. Ludmerer contends that national events and their associated social themes were the main context that drove the development of graduate medical education over time. To further this theory, he employs an interplay between primary and secondary sources. The quotes from residents about day-to-day life, their mentors, and the residency process really bring the book to life. These quotes are then balanced by more recent insights into those eras, which provide a broader perspective. As the pace of medicine accelerated over the last 50 years, so effectively does the pace of the book, which makes it fun to read as well.

On a micro level, there are a few entertaining aspects that make this book worth reading. First, we hear the voices of real individuals, known better as "giants of medicine" from the operations, procedures, and examination findings named after them. Second, the etiology of the term "house officers" is explained, which brings the term to life. Also, the portrayal of residents as being a family since the onset of graduate medical education allowed me to feel part of something much larger. However, as a resident, my favorite theme in this book is the service versus education balance, something that we still struggle with today. It is fascinating to discover this is not a new issue, but one that residents and faculty alike have grappled with in different ways since the formal training of physicians began. Finally, another storyline that emerges effectively in this book is the concept of academic faculty, physicians

who are dedicated to teaching. Using multiple adoring and respectful quotes from their students, a series of remarkable individuals are highlighted. We can all identify with these descriptions and note the many similarities between these past individuals and today's most effective mentors. Ludmerer illustrates the development of the academic physician as a crucial element in physician education, which evolves over time and becomes essential to the success of resident education.

The depth and thoroughness of the book are impressive. However, it is so comprehensive that it serves as more of a reference or encyclopedia than an easy weekend or airplane read. This was disappointing to me because although the history of residency is a valuable and interesting topic to residents and attendings, in this format it is too long and too dense to be easily digestible for the busy trainee or clinician. Also, as a woman in medicine, I wish more pages were devoted to medical education for women and underrepresented minorities. There is a small section that describes the integration of women and minorities into mainstream residency programs, which made me much more curious about the specific pathways these individuals pursued previously. Finally, most of the examples used in the book refer to medicine and surgery. There are minimal entries or histories that refer to pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, or psychiatry. Thus, although interesting, the appeal to a wider audience may be somewhat limited.

For the nonmedical reader with an interest in medicine, this book highlights central themes in the development of academic medicine and graduate medical education. Ludmerer describes this subject matter in an understandable and illustrative way that resonates with medical and nonmedical people alike. With grace and style this book tells a complicated story in a clear and thorough manner. Overall, both the history major and the resident in me were content. I gained a new sense of the true nature of the legacy I have inherited, and a sense of belonging to something bigger and more important than a single individual.

Sarah Dotters-Katz, MD

Fourth-Year Obstetrics-Gynecology Resident, Duke University Medical Center