Review of *Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science*

Atul Gawande, the author of *Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science* is a resident in surgery, who is a son of two doctors and graduated from Harvard. However, don’t let his credentials scare you into not picking up this strikingly informative and engaging book. The book is compiled of fourteen true stories (memoirs perhaps) under three chapters titled Fallibility, Mystery, and Uncertainty and everything a reader could want; mystery, argument, drama, science, humor and undeniably eye-opening facts and insight on the field of medicine. The best part of it though, is that it is written in a more personable first-person form and speaks in common English, so that no reader, regardless of education is isolated from the material.

In the first section of the book, titled Fallibility, Gawande introduces the reader to the reality about doctors: They are human. He discusses taboo subjects such as new unpracticed residents performing medical task on hospital patients for learning purposes. He also brings to light the fact that although technology is more advanced, trial and error techniques, mistakes, and uncertainties are still quite common. He reminds us that doctors, like us, must practice at their profession, and make mistakes in order to become better. They, like us, are in no way free of common problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, physical disability and depression. Perhaps he summarizes sentiments best when he says, “No matter what measures are taken, doctors will sometimes falter, and it isn’t reasonable to ask that we achieve perfection. What is reasonable is to ask that we never cease to aim for it” (74).

In his next two sections of the book, Mystery and Uncertainty, Gawande discusses several cases, treatments and operations and patients that his seen over the years. He talks about a woman who went overseas to get an operation to fix her blushing, people who experience chronic unknown pain, a pregnant woman who develops severe nausea, a man whose undergone gastric bypass surgery, autopsies, and more. He even discusses medicine, treatments and theories that relating to these cases. He never fails to present a well-rounded medical, psychological and social point of view.

The book relates to the topics in class in several aspects. First of all, as we discussed in class, there are many issues of disparity in available health care for patients. Gawande points out that many rural areas only have a small amount of staff, and surgeons who are expected to treat everything. Larger more urban areas have larger staffs and medical professionals can afford to perform in a more specialized area of work. Also, several larger hospitals can afford new technology that other hospitals cannot, and as technology changes, doctors themselves must update their practices and procedures. This book also discusses other topics from class such as medical ethics and the controversy of allowing risky surgical procedures.

I highly recommend this book to everyone, because it addresses issues that affect us individually as well as socially. Gawande does a great job of making us realize that as advanced in medicine as we may be, we are nowhere near perfect, and neither are doctors. He forces us to realize things that we don’t want to see or hear, but need to. He puts issues on the table to inform everyone, but entertain them at the same time. Don’t miss out on a great opportunity to reeducate yourself. Pick up this book today.