Extra Credit Book Report for Exam 1

Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science
Atul Gawande

Complications: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science is a fast passed, insightful diary of one resident turned doctor’s experience in the medical field. His biographical narrations allow one to feel like a fly-on-the-wall in some, graphic, first time learning experiences as a resident in the E.R. The novel’s conversational tone allures the reader in, and the text quickly appears to resemble diary entries or a scientific mystery rather than an ordinary science novel therefore keeping the reader’s attention.

Gawande’s book starts with his first accounts as a surgical resident. The reader can automatically identify with his nervous hesitation when he attempts to do his first “central line.” He stresses the fact that even after he has been done with his resident rotation for quite sometime he still finds himself learning new things and new technology. He brings the point home that a Doctor is someone who never stops learning. The author introduces the issues of new technology and Doctors opportunity to practice and test the equipment. Just as we have learned in class new technologies are often being introduced. Many professionals don’t always get the time or resources they need to properly familiarize themselves with the tools due to funding, and testing laws.

Another remarkable acknowledgement that is made in the first section of the book is the benefit vs. the risk that patients who are among the first to try out new technologies face. He expresses his feelings on a medical level as well as an ethical level on this topic. I found this part of the novel quite relevant to our resent lectures in class over the Belmont Report (respect, beneficence, and justice for patients).

The humanity that Gawande adds to the work is also quite insightful. He reflects on the rapport a doctor is positioned to build with a patient compared to the x-rays and the science advances that the patient represents. I did find it comforting that Gawande strives to prove that not all patients are alike and that he believes that a diagnosis should not work like a “cookbook” instead “it must take account of the idiosyncrasies of individual patients.”

Along with the fly on the operating room wall accounts, the book provides some intriguing realizations about the causes of nausea, chronic back pain, blushing, and other common phenomena’s. I found this section quite interesting because I didn’t know what causes these little sometimes-embarrassing occurrences.

The mal-practices addressed in the novel also seemed to hark back to the problems with insurance coverage and the cap on mal-practice lawsuits. The US isn’t solely in charge of the healthcare system in the US like other countries, and it leads one to wonder that if the were would the mal-practices continue on for so long.

Overall, the book was very entertaining and eye opening. Some of the stories are a little detailed (ex: the autopsy section), but overall the book is an educational look into the medical field. If an English major can enjoy this novel, anyone who is remotely interested in the science field would love it.