Have you ever wondered what your consultant is really thinking? What stories lie beyond the time they spend at daily ward rounds? What life in medicine is really like? What do they love about their career, and what do they hate? Where have they travelled to? What is the craziest experience they have had in medicine? And what do they think about YOU – the medical student?

In his memoir, Mind that Child, leading New Zealand (NZ) paediatrician Dr Simon Rowley answers these questions and more, giving readers a peek into his rich and diverse experiences as a doctor. Through a series of patient cases, amusing anecdotes, and insightful ponderings, Dr Rowley touches on a range of topics, from “a typical day as a neonatologist” to general comments on the NZ health system. Reading this book as a medical student, it helps provide a brief insight into the range of experiences and challenges one may face in their journey as a doctor.

As a neonatologist, Dr Rowley describes how he has seen a transformation in his field throughout his career, including the revolutionary discovery of using maternal corticosteroids before birth to accelerate foetal lung maturation. He also describes the unique ethical challenge that has arisen because of these advancements – how young is too young to keep alive? As he describes it: “the paradox of modern neonatology is that each time a new method is found for keeping younger babies alive, a practitioner like me has to think more deeply about the benefits of choosing not to do so. If you work in a NICU ward, this isn’t some abstract philosophical question.”

Dr Rowley touches on the difficulties of working with sick and vulnerable children every day, and the impact it has had on him personally. However, he also describes the rewarding nature of his work, most touchingly in a series of letters and exchanges between him and families he has cared for in the past.

Dr Rowley’s work in medicine over the years has spanned far beyond the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) ward. He describes spending time performing health assessments on Russian children seeking adoption in NZ, at times using just a few minutes of video footage. His work has also taken him to the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia, and he recounts the cultural differences and similarities between the practice of medicine in different parts of the world.

More recently, he describes his involvement in the organisation Brainwave Trust Aotearoa, an organisation focused on increasing awareness about the impacts of trauma on brain development. As described in his book: “In essence, if you can fill the first 1000 days of a child’s life with cuddles, attention and kindness, you’re setting them up for a happy, healthy and productive adulthood. Get those first 1000 days wrong, and the results are not so great.”

Packed with stories and educational content, this book is a great read for both pre-clinical and clinical medical students looking for insight into life on the ward and beyond. While there are a multitude of great books available depicting life in medicine, this memoir’s distinct charm is its “close to home” feeling, being published just two years ago and set mostly in hospitals around NZ. As a bonus, the paediatric Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section gives a great summary of some high yield paediatric topics!

As students roaming the ward, it can be hard at times to have a conversation with seniors that extends far beyond the tasks at hand. I often feel this is a lost opportunity, as I am sure each doctor’s experience in this exciting (and at times, unpredictable) career will mean they each have a unique piece of insight or wisdom to share. For me, this book was an opportunity to do just that – hear an honest and insightful account about a career in medicine, and all it can have to offer. With his easy-to-read style, this book felt like a conversation with a consultant about life and medicine.

References

About the author

Nandini Dubey is a final year medical student at the University of Auckland, currently placed at Tauranga Hospital. She is a true bookworm, and read a grand total of one book in 2019 (i.e. this book)

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