

BOOK REVIEW

Carrying the Black Bag: A Neurologist's Bedside Tales

Tom Hutton, MD. 247 pages. Texas Tech University Press; 2015. Box 1037, Lubbock, TX 79409-1037. Hardcover: US \$27.95; ISBN: 978-0-89672-954-4. Available from www.tupress.org, Amazon.com, and Barnes & Noble.

Field of Medicine: Mainly neurology, but applicable to most of the medical disciplines

Format: Hardcover book. Trim size: 6 × 9 inches

Recommended Readership: All members of the healthcare team and lay readers interested in the tales of a doctor who practiced medicine the old-fashioned way—listening to patients diligently, examining them carefully, and putting their welfare first, always

Purpose: Part memoir and part homage to patients who faced major illnesses with courage, grace, grit, and dignity

Content: There are 239 pages of text, containing a 9-page prologue, 15 chapters, and a 7-page afterword. The book also has a 2-page table of contents, 2 pages of acknowledgments, a 6-page index, and a paragraph about the author, Tom Hutton.

Each chapter is a complete story. Most of the stories pertain to a specific patient or group of patients encountered during the author's 30-plus years as a practicing neurologist in Minnesota and West Texas. Several chapters, however, focus on the author's training in the 1970s, when the little black bag was still a prominent symbol of the medical profession. And one chapter, an outlier, highlights the author's interest in, and insights into, Adolph Hitler's progressive Parkinson's disease. Hutton explains how that ailment had an adverse effect on the German military strategy in World War II.

Strengths: Excellent writing and editing characterize this book. I found no misspelled words, no grammatical mistakes, no faulty punctuation, no paragraphic errors, and no confusing sentences.

The stories are interesting and well chosen. They entertain, instruct, and cover a wide range of human qualities—humor, sacrifice, heroism, deceit, and love. From a pure medical perspective, 2 chapters stand out—the one on Hitler and one concerning a service veteran who surreptitiously and repeatedly poisoned himself with arsenic from store-bought ant-killer. That case ultimate-



ly led to the banning of arsenic from all ant-killers in America.

Other strengths include high-grade paper, a well-designed and attractive dust jacket, and print that is easy on the eyes.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this book shows the striking difference between medicine as the author practiced it (emphasis on the patient) and medicine as it is routinely practiced today (emphasis on technology).

Weaknesses: None of substance. Nevertheless, most of the stories had certain details and conversations that could have been deleted without harming the message, lessening the impact, or losing the reader's interest.

*Herbert L. Fred, MD, MACP,
Houston*

Overall Grade: ♥♥♥♥

Grading Key

♥♥♥♥♥ = outstanding; ♥♥♥♥ = excellent;
♥♥♥ = good; ♥♥ = fair; ♥ = poor