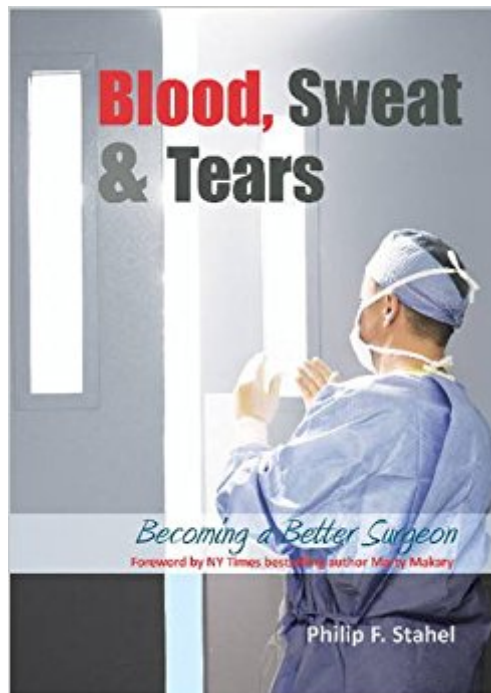




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Blood, Sweat & Tears: Becoming A Better Surgeon



Synopsis

All surgeons want to be better surgeons...They work hard to be respected by their peers, appreciated by their patients, and valued by their communities. Most of the estimated 200 million surgeries performed worldwide every year go as anticipated, with positive patient outcomes. However, the number of surgical complications and preventable medical errors still remains unacceptably high. Why are experienced surgeons still creating so many adverse events? More importantly, what can surgeons do to better address the situation? This book seeks to answer these questions. The book provides pragmatic examples on how good surgeons can grow from being technically brilliant to becoming empathetic and capable of providing safe, compassionate, and more effective patient care. The book follows trauma surgeon Philip Stahel's 20-year journey from his 'rookie years' in internship and residency, to his development as a global patient safety advocate, renowned academician and teacher, and compassionate surgeon. The book touches on why our current patient safety protocols and checklists fail to keep patients safe and how a physician-driven initiative with credible leadership is needed to build a sustainable 'culture of patient safety'. Written for a wide audience and based on the paradigm that "good judgment comes from experience which comes from poor judgment," the book provides in-depth coverage of all the critical and timely components of safe surgical care, relates practical tips for improving the quality of partnerships between surgeons and patients, and offers a practical guide on how to reduce the learning curve to becoming a better surgeon.

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Customer Reviews

Blood, Sweat & Tears: How to Become a Better Surgeon is a remarkable book that emphasizes empathy and communication, provocatively authored by a surgeon. However, as the reader will soon discover, Philip Stahel is not your ordinary surgeon. I strongly recommend every health care provider read this book. I further recommend this book be mandatory reading annually for every medical student, intern, resident and fellow-in-training, most especially chapters 3 and 4, which epitomize William Osler's advice, "Listen to the patient - he is telling you the diagnosis". In these 20 chapters, the many other insightful quotes alone are worth the purchase price.

Jerome M. Buckley, MD Retired CEO/Chairman, COPIC Companies Associate Clinical Professor, University of Colorado School of Medicine

The life of a surgeon is difficult. Life and limb threatening problems do not necessarily occur at convenient times. Surgery is not for the weak as it requires physical strength, emotional stamina, and unquenchable intellectual curiosity. Underneath these prerequisites lies the most important of all surgical requirements: the patient. With his emphasis on patient care found through empathy, shared decision making, and attention to detail, Dr. Stahel is telling the surgeon of today and tomorrow about the way to quality improvement and self-fulfillment. The emphasis on empathy is a crucial but neglected part of quality improvement. Why do our patients so frequently not adhere to our instructions? Putting yourself in the patient's position creates an essential surgeon-patient bond that underlies an optimal outcome. Dr. Stahel did not write the golden rule of "love thy neighbor as thyself", but it is clear that he sees this as an essential part of the surgeon-patient partnership. Both surgeon and patient will feel this effect, and it will pay dividends for both parties in the near and distant future. It is an important but disturbing reflection that many medical students lose their empathetic qualities during their clerkship years. There are many reasons that underlie this loss including our role models, the frantic pace of clinical activities, and the lack of clear direction as to the medical student role. Importantly, Dr. Stahel gives us a path to finding our empathy by rediscovering our humanism. Relating to the janitor, the nurse, and other members of the care team as people is an important first step in understanding the common ground that we share with our patients. Letting each member of the surgical team call the professor by his first name clearly tells the staff that all are important and essential. Giving his phone number to his patients shows the trust that Dr. Stahel shares with those who trust him. As I reflect upon my own 35-year career in surgery, I remember the eagerness with which I first approached operating room days. "A chance to cut is a chance to cure" and "the only way to heal is with cold steel" were chants that my fellow residents and I would often repeat. The operating room was its own sanctuary away from many realities of patient care. With time, I have

learned to appreciate other parts of patient care. In the clinic, I have a chance to know the patient as a person, and I have an opportunity to educate the patient as I would want to be educated. My path to becoming a better surgeon is far from over but my time to accomplish this is short. I truly wish that I had read such a book many decades ago as I began my life in surgery, but back then no such work was available. With *Blood, Sweat, & Tears*, Dr. Stahel has directed me to some needed tools that might help me reach this laudatory goal of ongoing quality improvement. I am most appreciative for his reflections and observations, and I remain hopeful that perhaps someday I might become a better surgeon.

Ted Clarke, MD Orthopaedic Surgeon and CEO and Chairman of COPIC, Denver, Colorado
"As a veteran Registered Nurse I feel that this book is a must read for anyone in health care! Dr. Philip Stahel has a very down to Earth writing style and compassionate approach to patient care. Reading this book has reinvigorated my love of nursing and passion for patient care."

Kerry Olson, RN
Blood, Sweat & Tears is a unique book - clearly one of a kind, and surprisingly not just of interest to those who work in healthcare. The book has a captivating narrative flow and the medical aspects are very easy to understand for non-clinical/laypersons as well. I will be sending my "baby boomer" parents a copy as it becoming increasingly important for the community to understand the complexity and challenges of our current healthcare system. My take-home point from this book is that we can and we should be involved in our healthcare choices and ask important and pertinent questions.

If you're like me, and you're interested in patient safety and eventually receiving high quality medical care if you ever become a patient, if you have a sense of humor, and you would like a different perspective on healthcare, this is the book for you!

Nicole Morgan, MHA

I applaud Dr. Stahel for presenting a rich compilation of his honest and remarkable first-hand experiences and the collective work of doctors and health care leaders to reduce the endemic variation in medical quality that contributes to the #3 cause of death in the U.S. today--medical care itself.

Marty Makary, MD, MPH
Author of the New York Times bestseller, *Unaccountable*

Blood Sweat & Tears is a great book, one of a kind and destined to be a medical classic.

What makes the book exceptional is that the narrative is about a difficult human endeavor, often done imperfectly, by humans who have been told they should be 'perfect'. This quintessential paradox is why this book is a practical story about life and will likely be of interest and enjoyment to many outside the realm of medicine.

Wade Smith, MD
Co-founding Editor, *Patient Safety in Surgery*

This book is outstanding, and not just for surgeons! As a practicing attorney, Dr. Stahel's insights into creating a meaningful life and practice in a high pressure professional environment are invaluable. This book contains a great mix of inspirational ideas and practical, everyday tips for thriving in high pressure environments by keeping the focus on the people we serve, and the people that we can support, even if their jobs involve supporting us. I particularly enjoyed the sections on empathy and avoiding burnout. This is a fast read, and I expect that I will go back to reading sections of this book again and again as I progress in my own professional journey. I was challenged and inspired by this tremendous book and cannot recommend it enough!

As an aspiring medical student, I am always eager to gain insight into the field of medicine, especially surgery. This book does that and then some. From providing firsthand accounts from Dr. Philip Stahel's days as a resident, to giving powerful insight into his philosophies on patient care and advocacy, this book is an entertaining and informative read that anyone interested in gaining an understanding of the complexities of surgery should absolutely invest in. Dr. Philip Stahel's book provides a unique look into the many converging factors that affect the patient-physician relationship and I will be encouraging my friends and family to read this book, as I think it serves as a valuable source of information for patient and provider (or future provider) alike.

I am an Orthopedic Trauma Surgeon and I had the pleasure to meet Philip a few years ago, and as I told him as soon as I finished his book: "I wish I had read this book 20 years ago, it is a piece of art!!!". It should be a must for medical students, interns, residents, fellows and for all of us busy trauma surgeons. It will become the first book I will give my mentees from now on. Thanks Philip for giving us all this.

I am a medical vendor and I really enjoyed reading this book. In working with Surgeon's on a regular basis it was nice to look at things from a different vantage point. It's great to see the book reinforce accountability being pushed more and more throughout our medical systems. Personally, I will be asking even more questions as needs arise for myself and loved ones. Thank you!

A must-read for anyone in medicine even if you will not be a surgeon.

Great book with a positive message. If you want to live a more positive life, read it. Not just for surgeons. Should have been titled: "Becoming a Better Person"!

Love it!!

"Blood, Sweat and Tears" offers an engaging, honest, and highly personal account of the life of a surgeon, the challenges faced by the medical profession today, and of the responsibilities and opportunities that doctors AND patients have to work towards improving the safety of a system that can perform miracles, but that can also fail us in the most horrific ways. I am neither a physician nor a surgeon. I don't watch any of the popular hospital ER TV series, yet I found myself reading this book in one sitting. I was gripped by the unpretentious behind-the-scenes look we get at a profession that can play (and in the case of my family: has played) a crucial role in our lives. Phil (as Dr. Stahel prefers to be called) offers an intimate account of his career. He is willing to openly discuss some of the mistakes and personal challenges encountered during over 30 years of practicing medicine at the highest level of intensity (as a trauma and orthopedic surgeon). Without sensationalism, Phil recounts real human tragedies, appalling instances where the system harmed rather than helped its patients. At the same time, the book is personal in the way it engages its reader, in how it asks us to think along, how it uses (self-deprecating) humor, and couples pearls of wisdom (from Aristotle to Frank Sinatra) with pragmatic advice. The advice Phil offers is directed not only toward surgeons, but also intends to empower the patient. Do you know how to pick your surgeon? What questions you should ask your surgeon? What should raise red flags in your consultation with a surgeon? Phil fills you in! While I was interested in reading how being a patient comes not only with rights, but also with responsibilities, I was surprised to learn how much a patient can and should impact the surgeon's decision-making process. The book's main purpose, of course, is to make suggestions on how to improve safety and help surgeons become better surgeons (beyond the development of fileting techniques). But even when Phil discusses specific medical safety protocols, risk assessment strategies, dangerous research biases, and the perils of (over) regulation and standardization, the layman reader has much to learn. The benefits of empathy, for example, of improved workflows, of collaboration and the removal of communication barriers through the reduction of hierarchies apply to any field that has to negotiate complex institutional structures with specific human needs (I'm most familiar with higher education and social work, but imagine these matters being relevant in most modern work places). Phil addresses the very important issue of implementing safety standards that rival those of the aviation industry, but to a layman the benefit of reading this book are more personal in nature. Phil offers concrete suggestions on how to become more efficient while creating time for your self to

think, read, and enjoy the moment. There is the afore-mentioned emphasis on empathy, a central theme of the book, designed not only to make you a better surgeon or professional, but a better--and happier--person. And finally, Phil offers personal reflections on what it means to be a leader, namely by acting as a servant and model for others to follow. And this is indeed the book's most inspiring message: In its honesty and directness, it serves as a model in humility, courage and dedication for a profession that owes it to itself and its patients to continually improve its safety standards. Phil shows us that we can contribute to this project as patients, advocates, and voters.

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