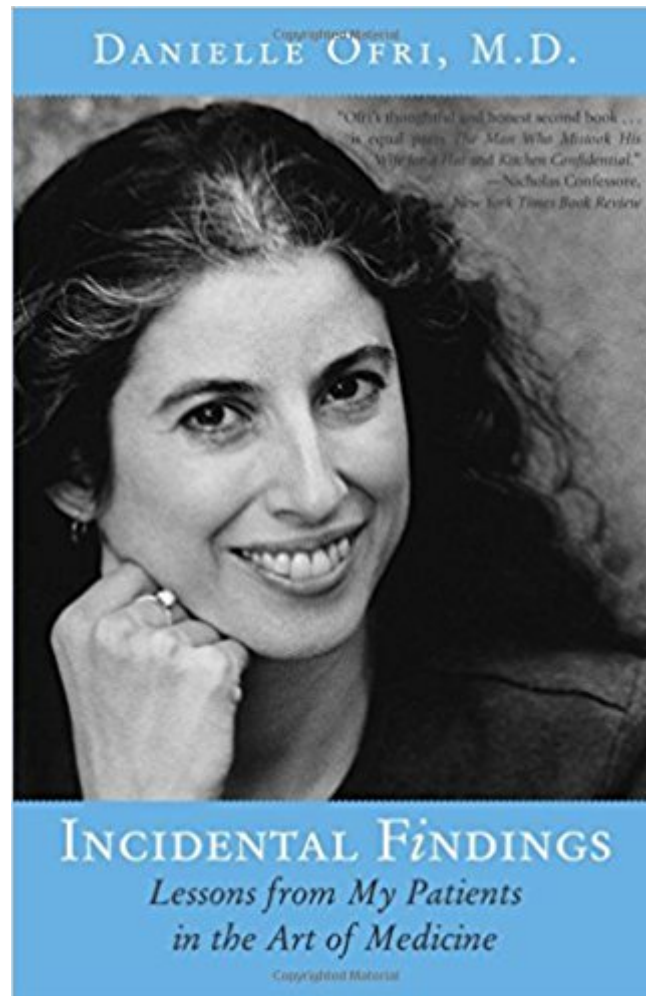




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# Incidental Findings: Lessons From My Patients In The Art Of Medicine



## Synopsis

In *Singular Intimacies*, which the *New England Journal of Medicine* said captured the 'essence of becoming and being a doctor,' Danielle Ofri led us into the hectic, constantly challenging world of big-city medicine. In *Incidental Findings*, she's finished her training and is learning through practice to become a more rounded healer. The book opens with a dramatic tale of the tables being turned on Dr. Ofri: She's had to shed the precious white coat and credentials she worked so hard to earn and enter her own hospital as a patient. She experiences the real 'slight prick and pressure' of a long needle as well as the very real sense of invasion and panic that routinely visits her patients. These fifteen intertwined tales include 'Living Will,' where Dr. Ofri treats a man who has lost the will to live, and she too comes dangerously close to concluding that he has nothing to live for; 'Common Ground,' in which a patient's difficult decision to have an abortion highlights the vulnerabilities of doctor and patient alike; 'Acne,' where she is confronted by a patient whose physical and emotional abuse she can't possibly heal, so she must settle on treating the one thing she can, the least of her patient's problems; and finally a stunning concluding chapter, 'Tools of the Trade,' where Dr. Ofri's touch is the last in a woman's long life.

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## Customer Reviews

Ofri, an attending physician at New York City's Bellevue Hospital and founder of the *Bellevue Literary Review*, again displays the same sensitivity and carefully crafted writing that distinguished

her first medical memoir (*Singular Intimacies*). The emphasis in these 14 engrossing pieces is on her determination to learn from those she has treated. Ofri begins by recounting a time when the shoe was on the other foot, when she, as a first-time expectant mother, was the patient. After a sonogram, Ofri and her husband were rather casually told that their baby's umbilical cord was missing one artery. Her disorientation and anxiety that day deepened her ability to empathize with those who are ill. In "A Day in the Clinic," she describes how a language barrier left her unable to effectively comfort an Asian man with a brain tumor. In the especially moving "Terminal Thoughts," Ofri intuits that a woman's signature on a Do Not Resuscitate order and her refusal of dialysis were rooted in depression. Ofri reworks her pain medications and extracts a promise that the patient will stay on dialysis. The patient will not be cured, but Ofri's goal is not to provide happy endings; rather, she aims to wed compassion to medical training and knowledge, to recall her ongoing struggles to understand the sick and to make their lives more bearable. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ofri supported a postgraduate semisabbatical by taking temporary assignments, filling in where needed at a variety of hospitals and clinics as she traveled the country. The experience, originally planned as a quasi vacation to recover from the rigors of medical residency, resulted in much more than she bargained for. Indeed, Ofri learned more--the incidental findings of the title--about the softer emotional underbelly of medicine than she had picked up clinically. One can't help wondering whether this exceptional series of introspective essays on her experiences serves more to remind the Bellevue physician, as she now is, of patients' basic humanity than to record that humanity for posterity. The musings seem drawn from her very marrow and too personally raw to be originally intended for broad distribution. "In the end," she concludes, "medicine will always be about one patient and one physician together in one room, connecting through the most basic of communication systems: touch." Good writing + good doctor = good reading. Donna Chavez Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Dr. Ofri achieves a delicate balance with this book. On its face it's a series of vignettes about doctoring in the modern era--certainly a rich and fraught topic--but it does far more with this theme than do most such memoirs. While the medical details are handled effectively, the heart of the book, in every sense, is Dr. Ofri's encounters with her patients as individuals. Some she likes immensely;

some she cannot find a way, despite her best efforts, to like. An elderly man does everything possible to thwart the delivery of care that will help him, yet wins her respect by challenging her assumptions about the roles of doctor and patient. She realizes that if she's going to help him as a doctor, she must somehow make time to engage his deeper doubts, some of which raise questions in her own mind. A young woman faces a crisis pregnancy alone; her doctor feels an obligation to step carefully outside her conventional role and make sure she is supported emotionally as well as medically. The personalities and life situations of some patients throw roadblocks in her path as she tries to care for them; other patients magnetize her toward them in ways that test the boundaries of the conventional doctor-patient relationship, posing dilemmas that she works through as we listen in. For Dr. Ofri, medicine is dialogue, not monologue. Sometimes the dialogue is with patients, and these passages are compellingly written. Other dialogues, equally compelling, are with the reader, as she carefully observes her responses and wrestles through conflicts and ambiguities to find a way forward. Her candor is reliable and sometimes startling: I was struck by her willingness to say what is usually taboo, to talk about her mixed feelings when confronted with a truly difficult or unlikeable patient. We expect doctors to be neutral and "professional," not allowing their personal likes and dislikes to enter the sacred space of the doctor-patient encounter; yet do we really want to be cared for by a doctor who suppresses her natural human feelings, or her intelligence as a social being? Dr. Ofri clearly would rather feel and wrestle with the consequences, and this is a brave position to take in the world of contemporary medicine. We see Dr. Ofri in situ, as an attending physician at Bellevue who mentors interns while struggling to keep up with the breakneck pace of a complex urban medical center. But we also see her far out of her element, on temporary assignment at a small-town Catholic hospital whose ban on discussing contraception and abortion flies in the face of her values as a liberal New Yorker. Each situation presents conflicts that must be worked through, sometimes with a satisfactory outcome and sometimes less so. As always, the rigorous candor of the writing ensures that all this self-reflection is never tendentious or cloying: on the contrary, we are engaged at every step. Dr. Ofri is on a journey, and the tale of her travels is a very good read.

Everything I have ever read by Danielle Ofri combines extreme intelligence and praiseworthy compassion. This book is no exception. Ofri's willingness to learn from her patients is quite impressive, given that so many doctors in this day and age do not think anyone without an M.D. has anything to offer them. The nature of the book allows it to be read in short bursts, which is a plus -- but, alas, she writes so well that the temptation to read through the entire book in a day, ignoring

things like work and family, is great. I did that... and now I am reading it again, slowly, savoring the nuances I missed the first time. What pleasure! Definitely a high-value read.

Oh to have a physician like Danielle Ofri. A physician that is smart, and caring. Danielle is also a magnificent writer. She can bounce around a page and tell stories of her practice in detail so that you get to know her patients as well as she does. Her energy is only second to her inquisitive mind. Not lots of blood and guts, but honest feelings with a gift for humanity. A wonderful read and educational for all.

I have read other books by this author. If only all doctors could be as compassionate as her the world would be a better place. If I had my way it would be required reading for all medical students on how to treat your patients with dignity and feeling.

As a medical student-writer who tries hard to cling to my ideals of how I want to practice in spite of the ever-crazy world in which we train, Dr. Ofri's book gives me hope that my ideal practice truly is a reality. She is utterly human in her accounts of her journey in residency, speaking of mistakes and insecurities, but fearlessly takes us on that journey with her and allows us to watch how her patients transform her and she them. It also reminds me how important it is to carry the patient's story and to simply listen--and reminds me that because it is so important, it is also wholly possible, even in a 30-hour day. Highly recommended for anyone in medicine or considering going into it, as well as anyone who wants an honest glimpse at life in the hospital.

I liked this book. It's a bit like James Herriot, but people not animals. I know something about her subject through my work and her depictions are very accurate and compassionate. It's easy to understand her descriptions, even if you are not a doctor!

Have read only half of the book so far, but have enjoyed the physician's experiences as a relief from heavier subjects I've been reading. Interesting insider reflections.

A wonderful book. After reading another of her books I found I wanted to read more. She is intriguing and interesting to read. With a medical background she definitely kept my interest. Keep writing Dr Ofri . I will read all your medical writings.

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