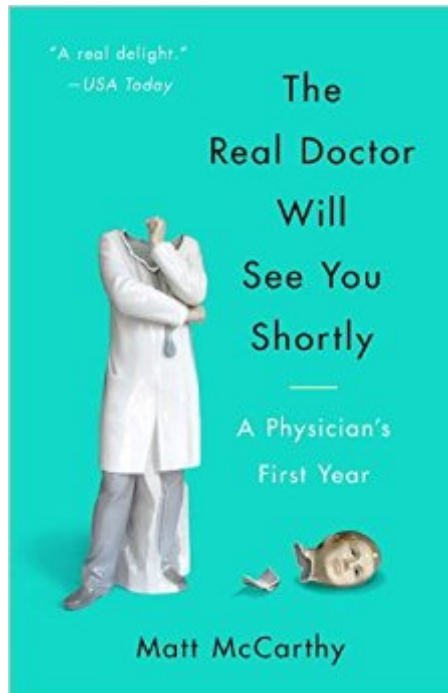


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# The Real Doctor Will See You Shortly: A Physician's First Year



## Synopsis

In medical school, Matt McCarthy dreamed of being a different kind of doctor—the sort of mythical, unflappable physician who could reach unreachable patients. But when a new admission to the critical care unit almost died his first night on call, he found himself scrambling. Visions of mastery quickly gave way to hopes of simply surviving hospital life, where confidence was hard to come by and no amount of med school training could dispel the terror of facing actual patients. This funny, candid memoir of McCarthy's intern year at a New York hospital provides a scorchingly frank look at how doctors are made, taking readers into patients' rooms and doctors' conferences to witness a physician's journey from ineptitude to competence. McCarthy's one stroke of luck paired him with a brilliant second-year adviser he called "Baio" (owing to his resemblance to the Charles in Charge star), who proved to be a remarkable teacher with a wicked sense of humor. McCarthy would learn even more from the people he cared for, including a man named Benny, who was living in the hospital for months at a time awaiting a heart transplant. But no teacher could help McCarthy when an accident put his own health at risk, and showed him all too painfully the thin line between doctor and patient. *The Real Doctor Will See You Shortly* offers a window on to hospital life that dispenses with sanctimony and self-seriousness while emphasizing the black-comic paradox of becoming a doctor: How do you learn to save lives in a job where there is no practice? From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My husband received an advanced reader's copy in the mail and I took advantage of his absence to

read this book cover to cover in a few hours. Inasmuch as it is possible, Matt McCarthy conveys Intern Year in the life of the recently graduated med school student. His writing skillfully portrays the stifling neuroses, utter exhaustion, panic and developing competence that aren't unique to him alone. It also gives the reader a broader glimpse at the other side--take a peek behind the impersonal, impassive facade of the medical staff you've encountered in your life. In a broader context, the book could be used as a sweeping indictment of our current healthcare system in the United States. ('See if you can convince the comatose woman's medical proxy to agree to quality-of-life services as we need a free bed in ICU,' or 'I know you're clean living and all, but you have AIDS because of one indiscretion last week--and now that I've destroyed your world, let me ignore you and turn my attention to the class following me around--let's go over the symptoms that might lead you to order blood work so that you can identify AIDS.')

Ever get tired of seeing a different face every time you visit your Primary Care Provider (and what is WITH that terminology?) Don't blame the good doc; blame the horrible system that encourages that continual shuffling and lack of healthy 1:1 relations with a single doctor. This book is mildly amusing and quite informative, and the narrative will hold you throughout. Well done, Mr. McCarthy! I look forward to reading more of his works.

Apparently they are teaching writing in medical school these days. What else can explain Oliver Sacks, Atul Gawande, Lewis Thomas, Pauline Chen, and so many more? Matt McCarthy can join that group now, because his *The Real Doctor Will See You Shortly* is right up there with the works of these other doctor-writers. In describing his first year out of medical school as an intern or a first year resident in a hospital, McCarthy tells a story that combines the solve-the-mystery aspect of the Think Like a Doctor blog in The New York Times with the often moving essays of Oliver Sacks. McCarthy's first year as a doctor seems to be as much about being a decent human being as much as being a good doctor. McCarthy describes the thirty-hour shifts and the non-stop action, the highs of saving a life, the despair of losing a patient, the fear of being exposed to a deadly virus, so that you get a real feeling for what it must be like to be a newly minted M.D. Looking forward to more from this young doctor.

The cover art for this book might be a turnoff. I almost didn't order this Vine selection thinking this would probably be yet another rendition of the old Doctor Kildare movie series. However, this book answered a lot of questions I had regarding how doctors are trained and what their experiences are like. I remembered my own experiences a couple of decades as a patient. I had some serious

complications during a medical procedure and had a three week stay at a major learning hospital associated with a major university. Med students floated in and out of my room at least twice a day as I was poked and prodded and pretty much left exposed. This book is anecdote driven yet also expresses the hopes and fears of the young doc in training who is running on adrenaline. The hours are long, grueling, and sleep deprived. It is a time when text book learning is out into play. The object is to help and do no harm because this is the real world and not some kind of dress rehearsal; it is make or break time. It is also a time of grave seriousness and hilarious moments. During the year the doctor spends at an NYC hospital while all the textbook stuff and theory becomes reality, the author also deals with patients. One who he becomes close to is waiting for a heart transplant. The doctor himself faces a potential medical crisis of his own. As I read this book I couldn't help but wonder if the young doctor might have become a writer if medicine hadn't beckoned. This book had a natural flow and good organization. It was interesting and obviously varied and really nailed the experiences in play when study suddenly becomes quick immersion into the world of medicine and life and death situations. This was a very good book and for me a very interesting reading experience.

My wife and I met after she had already finished her residency program, so I, thankfully, did not experience the duress of intern/residency life. She has not talked much about it, mostly just dropping hints of a time best forgotten. Matt McCarthy does the opposite. He extensively documents his intern year and all its trials and tribulations. Judging by what he has written, it was mostly trials. If this is a typical intern year, it is amazing so many doctors survive this period. He focuses on a few key people and events and appears to keep other influences (his personal relationships and clinical practice areas) relegated to secondary importance. Maybe they were not as influential, but he did marry his girlfriend and eventually chose infectious medicine as his specialty. It turns out my wife started one residency and then switched to another after a year. She actually completed two years as an intern. My take on all this is if she can survive two years as an intern, my peccadilloes must not be even a blip on her radar.

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