



# **The Lonely Patient: How We Experience Illness**

*Michael Stein*

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When someone is diagnosed with a serious illness, he or she is taking the first step on an overwhelmingly challenging and confusing journey. For many, it is as if they are traveling to someplace entirely new and they must go there alone, with only faded directions back to their old lives. Often, even their loved ones can only guess at what they must be experiencing.

*The Lonely Patient* is a clear-eyed and deeply affecting examination of the inner life of those grappling with illness. It looks into the chasm between the well and the sick by exploring and giving voice to the often unarticulated aspects of illness, offering people with illness—and their family and friends—a frank and intelligent discussion of how to negotiate the psychological and emotional aspects of what they are going through.

Michael Stein, M.D., a professor of medicine at Brown University Medical School as well as an acclaimed novelist, uses the stories of a number of patients, including that of his beloved, terminally ill brother-in-law, Richard, to consider the personal narrative of sickness. What sets Stein's book apart is his intimate scrutiny of the uniqueness of each patient's experience, which he breaks into four parts—betrayal, terror, loss, and loneliness—and renders each in such a way that he opens a dialogue about our expectations of health and, after its shocking disappearance, of illness.

Beautifully written and keenly insightful, *The Lonely Patient* is a valuable book for patients and their caregivers—as well as a probing inquiry into a universal experience.

## The Lonely Patient: How We Experience Illness Details

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Author : Michael Stein

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# **From Reader Review The Lonely Patient: How We Experience Illness for online ebook**

## **Maggie says**

it's a rambling discourse on what it's like to be a patient - betrayed, terrified, at a loss, lonely - by a doctor. flashes of insight, but a little on the touchy-feely hyper-emotional side.

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## **TJ says**

Clinical Health Care Ethics Phil 472

Ok, I understand where the author is coming from, but I've read better books. And books that didn't assume and tell others stories from what the author thinks is their view point. As we say in CPE and chaplaincy, speak from the I perspective

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## **Karen Worstell says**

### **A must read for physicians and chaplains**

Dr. Stein's insights into illness and the experience of the patient are invaluable perspectives for those in the healing arts. Highly recommend for chaplains.

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## **Daisy says**

I'm not sure this book will be of any interest to most people but if the reader has any experience with a long-term, unexplained or serious illness it's right on the money. The Lonely Patient explores the universality of the illness experience but by using personal stories doesn't become pedantic. It was re-assuring to read that a doctor considered doctors to be dismissive of pain patients, frightened patients, disfigured patients and patients who don't respond as expected. If only it were required reading at medical school. When it comes out in paperback I think I'll send copies to every doctor I've seen in the past 2 1/2 years.

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## **Cori says**

To be particularly honest, I was sadly unimpressed with this book. What could have been an emotionally overflowing and moving book was written like a high school essay, including the obligatory dictionary definitions of important words and obscure quotes from books no reader would know.

Do not recommend. Apologies to my mentor, who recommended this book to me. Grrr....

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### Alexis says

I think all doctors should read this book. All med students and residents should pick up a copy. It's a lot cheaper than a textbook, too. Perhaps if more doctors read this book there would be more empathy for the patients who have a life-threatening or terminal or chronic illness. Sadly, I have known few who have taken the time to listen to what I am *feeling* about the diagnosis, emotion wise. They are all too eager to discuss physical symptoms, but let's leave the metaphorical heart out of it. So I always end up walking away feeling more lonely than I did before the visit or the phone call.

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### Lesley says

Visceral account of the emotions experienced by an ill person. Telling accounts of people who face extremely difficult prognoses, how they feel defined by their illness and lack of good health, and how they deal with it. Very powerful.

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### Siobhan says

Even though it's a difficult read I mark it as five stars. It's difficult because it will more than likely bring up memories very clearly of times of sickness, darkness and decay of yourself and people you've known. But in reading it I learned more about myself and how I had been shaped with the various forms that disease has taken through out my life. My reasons for reading it was to be more prepared for people I would come into contact with in my life, perhaps through teaching yoga or someday through a career as a masseuse. I feel more understanding and got to realize how much I already did. I recommend it to anyone in the health care professions or to people who are ill and are afraid, needing to put their intense experiences into words, to feel understood.

Namaste  
Sat Nam

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### Bryan Kibbe says

Michael Stein brings a physician's insight and a storyteller's craft to this insightful account of human illness. While physiological accounts of human pain are relatively easy to come by, genuine insight into the meaning of illness and the existential suffering often associated with it is more difficult to find. The Lonely Patient offers a careful and engaging consideration of the emotions that a patient must come to terms with following a significant medical diagnosis of disease or sickness. Personally, I was most struck by Stein's observation of the feeling of self-betrayal that a patient feels when they learn that their body is not performing the way it is supposed to. Stein's efforts to weave such insights as these amidst his own experiences with patients makes this one of the best pieces of medical non-fiction around.

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## **L says**

I liked it enough to read the whole thing. That being said, I don't think this book is for everyone. It has some good insights and makes interesting points that would be good for all of us to know. While insights can be good, unfortunately this book isn't practical enough to appeal to the utilitarian in me nor is it scientific or research-based in a way that appeals to the nerd in me.

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## **Jessica Rae says**

I'm only halfway through this book, but here's what I can say at this point:

Stein's objective is to represent the experience of illness from the perspective of the sufferer. His notion of illness revolves around the common metaphor that illness is a journey into foreign territory. Stein emphasizes the importance of the patient's narrating her illness as a means of discovery, and a process by which she can find empowerment, psychic release, and (sometimes) pain-relief. Simultaneously, Stein recognizes the difficulty of representing pain linguistically, and the frustrating "wordlessness" and isolation (alienation, even) that pain experiences inflict. He relies heavily on Elaine Scarry's work in "The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World." Anyone who has read Scarry's groundbreaking book will recognize her first two chapters in simplified form in Stein's "The Lonely Patient."

"The Lonely Patient" is highly-accessible, pleasant reading. It contains some interesting clinical tales. It will serve as a useful, rudimentary, introduction to contemporary biocultural pain theories, but it won't give you much of the nitty-gritty. For advanced information you'll have to go elsewhere.

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## **Rosalind says**

I'll be honest, found this book slightly heartbreaking (especially towards the end), but worth a read as a truly insightful portrayal of the ill person's experience. It is good to be reminded of those doctors with great empathy and conscience who wish to better support the patients in their care.

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## **Shawna says**

As someone who has had an incurable, chronic illness for many years, I found this book has been very accurate in describing the experience and the psychological process

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## **Christy says**

Stein describes four feelings experienced by ill people: betrayal, terror, loneliness and loss. He uses case stories from his own experience as a doctor and also includes the story of his brother-in-law who died of

cancer. It was an interesting book for me, and Stein has such a compassionate voice. However, I think it is a book really meant for a specific audience, for those who are dealing with illness, whether as a doctor, patient or caregiver. I feel that more could have been said on how best to reach out to someone in ill health, but I think the book explains why it is so difficult to do so. Illness is such a lonely state of being. When one is in pain, you can't imagine being healthy. When one is healthy, one cannot truly imagine pain.

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