



Positive: One Doctor's Personal Encounters with Death, Life, and the US Healthcare System

Michael Saag

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Positive traces the life of Michael S. Saag, MD, an internationally known expert on the virus that causes AIDS, but the book is more than a memoir: through his story, Dr. Saag also shines a light on the dysfunctional US healthcare system, proposing optimistic yet realistic remedies drawn from his distinguished medical career.

Mike Saag began his medical residency in 1981, within days of the Centers for Disease Control's first report of a mysterious "gay cancer" killing young men. Soon, the young doctor's career was yoked to the epidemic. His life's work became turning the most deadly virus in human history into a chronic, manageable disease.

In the lab at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Dr. Saag and colleagues made seminal early discoveries about the elusive virus. And at the AIDS clinic he founded, Dr. Saag met people whose fight against a virtual death sentence touched his heart and inspired him to work even harder. As his career stretched across three decades, Dr. Saag found himself battling another foe, this one almost as pernicious as AIDS itself: a broken healthcare system shaped more by politicians, insurers, and lobbyists than by patients' needs.

Positive is Dr. Saag's tribute to the unforgettable patients he has known and an urgent call to create a comprehensive, compassionate, accessible healthcare system in the name of those we can save today.

Positive: One Doctor's Personal Encounters with Death, Life, and the US Healthcare System Details

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Donnacporter says

The personal stories were raw and powerful and drew me in from the start. I read it while traveling and honestly could not put it down until I was done. I especially appreciated learning more about his family and the sacrifices they've made to support his life's work. What a wonderful legacy for such a gifted and caring person.

Seth Kramer says

A heart breaking and inspiring walk through the early days of the AIDS crisis and the hard learned lessons that we don't seem to be applying to our healthcare system as a whole. The only discontinuity I saw was that at several points Dr. Saag is asking the reader to think like a doctor to some extent, see the long range implications, be fact-based. He does this by telling a series of personal, emotional vignettes. While an appeal to emotion is likelier to work, it would seem to defeat the point of one of his central arguments. Slight annoyance: might be a early edition problem, but there are small portions of the book that seem to be inexplicably in 3rd person.

Sanjeev says

US Healthcare Viewed From the Trenches of AIDS Research & Care

Dr. Saag is an academic clinician, doing AIDS research and care in Alabama, who grew up and did medical training in Kentucky.

This book is a recount of his medical training, HIV research, AIDS care and encounters with the inequities US healthcare.

The later half and big part of the book concentrates on how the various special interests control the US healthcare dollars and shaft the the average person for whose benefit the whole system is meant.

Overall the book is well written, makes an easy read, and gives overview of the American healthcare system from the trenches. I got the Kindle version of this book from Netgalley for review and I see that as of now, only the expensive hard copy version is available for purchase. That is my only quibble. I hope the publisher makes the Kindle version available at a reasonable price.

Emily Cournoyer says

This book was amazing. I started out reading it thinking it told me way too much about the author and that I was getting bored. But that was quickly out of my mind. He put me in his shoes during a huge event that infected the world. This book was one of my favorites that I read from netgalley and I would definitely read any other book that this author wrote. He kept me entertained and engrossed in the book and I just couldn't

put it down. My hats off to you.

Katbyrdie says

This book. I honestly don't know how to fully describe my relationship with it. My Uncle's partner died of AIDS. My Uncle was, somehow, unable to get the disease. I have a chronic illness that will probably kill me. This book spoke to me on a deeply personal level. This book is beautiful, honest, and often funny. Dr. Saag explores the evolution of AIDS, from its start to technological advances of today. He provides antidotes that connects the reader to his patients' personal stories. Also, he tells his own story as a father, husband, teacher, researcher, and Jew. Everything one could feel, I felt during this memoir: sorrow, joy, empowerment, anger, frustration, pride, hope, love, and so much more. If you have any interest in queer history, healthcare, or AIDS, you must read this book. It should be a requirement. I feel blessed to have been given a chance to read this, I bought my own personal copy (despite being given a free copy through netgalley), and I plan on purchasing copies for friends.

Clloyd says

I laughed, I cried and I learned.

Dr. Saag has intertwined his love of life, love of family and love of his calling with a teary-eyed backdrop of incredible human tragedy occurring due to the cruelty of a healthcare system needing repair. He captures the reader by exposing his most intimate emotions through a unique writing style combining the elements of a humorist, your favorite teacher and caring husband, father and human being.

Meanwhile, I believe an unintended consequence is coming to understand how we in the U.S. actually avoided a catastrophic crisis due to the unselfish efforts of a group of dedicated highly intelligent researchers, caregivers and philanthropists.

Read Positive.

Bill says

An excellent book. I highly recommend this book to those interested in the medical history of the AIDS epidemic, and in reading a perceptive analysis of our US health care system, as of 2014. I am married to one of the NP's in the book, and have known Mike Saag for the 19 years she has worked at The 1917 Clinic, described so correctly in his book. The descriptions included are accurate and real, as is his assessment of the US health care system.

Becca says

As a medical student, I really enjoyed this book. Dr. Saag remembers the early days of HIV and isn't afraid to point out the not-so-pretty side of medicine during that time. The reality is painful but necessary to understand in moving forward with medicine. You are left with the realization of just how far we've come since those early days. But he also discusses how far we still have left to go and how the state of our medical system effects healthcare delivery, challenging us to continue to do more and do better.

The best part of this book was that he made it personal. I was drawn in by the stories of his father's medical struggles and memories of past patients. He gave us a personal look into his life and the life of patient's with HIV. His compassion and dedication to health care came through on every page and you can't help but want to care as much as he does. Through his use of both medical facts and personal anecdotes, Dr. Saag managed to give his cause a face that you won't soon forget.

Angie and the Daily Book Dose says

Positive is a book I can stand behind! Dr. Saag has eloquently provided both a moving testament to the early days of HIV/AIDS treatment and a scathing indictment of the System of Health Care available to the citizens of the US today.

I recommend reading *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story* as a companion volume if you are strictly seeking to learn about the ravages the early years of HIV infection had on small American communities in the south. What Dr. Verghese never spoke of in his memoir was the state of the healthcare system, and his and his patients ability to navigate within that system. This is where Dr. Saag's book picks up the slack and tells it like it is. He describes his own father's struggles with medical issues resulting from lack of insurance. The patients he had who had spotty insurance which directly led to their deaths, the medications not covered, etc.

Dr. Saag ends with 8 things we can do in America to improve our health care system. He also discusses the AHA and it's origins in a Republican Think Tank; how 'Obamacare' is a good start, but ultimately a drop in the bucket of reform.

As a practitioner of the Jewish faith, Dr. Saag explained how these words from the Book of Isiah are spoken at the end of Shiva. They have meaning to me as I finish this review. "Your sun shall set no more, your moon no more withdraw; for the Lord shall be a light to you forever, and your days of mourning shall be ended"

Monica says

In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that I was a friend of Cyndie's, one of the patients Dr. Saag mentions in this book. He captures her spirit beautifully and treats the story of her journey with gentle respect. In fact, he does this with all his patients. The book is filled with humor, compassion, information and inspiration. It's a part biography, part history and part commentary on the state of health care in the United States.

Nina says

Michael Saag was a medical resident when HIV hit. He never intended to make infectious disease his specialty, but HIV was a force he couldn't ignore. Saag gives us a poignant, brilliant recollection of the early years of HIV, the anguish and despair not only of those who had the virus, but the healthcare providers racing to discover treatments. Interspersed with vignettes about patients, *Positive* chronicles the early research for pharmaceutical interventions as well as the scientific understanding of this complex virus.

Positive is also a scathing indictment of the U.S. healthcare system. Saag demonstrates how "the system" turned its back on many of our most vulnerable, stigmatized citizens.

Saag's memoir is engaging and gripping. It should be recommended reading for all healthcare students. As George Santayana said, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Stephanie says

"Too many Americans who fall ill are forced to worry about how to pay their medical bills and the threat of medical bankruptcy, rather than focusing on getting well or coping with maladies that won't improve. Too many Americans cannot obtain decent, affordable insurance because they have preexisting conditions, lack the financial resources, or work for a small business. Too many Americans with permanent disabilities must wait too long before Medicare covers them. Too many Americans who are eligible for Medicaid and CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program) fall between the cracks. Too many insured Americans are only one illness away from discovering they have inadequate coverage that leaves them with overwhelming bills. Too many Americans have to fight their insurance companies to obtain covered benefits.

That these and other indignities have persisted so long is an indictment of U.S health policy and its moral quality. If there is one thing we should learn from the experiences of other countries that have universal coverage, it is that it doesn't have to be this way. None of these problems are natural or inevitable-They are all the result of policy choices the United States has made." -Oberlander

Jenn says

I won this book in a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

I really enjoyed this book because not only did it cover the practice of HIV/AIDS medicine from the beginning of the epidemic through today, the author also discussed the status of our pitiful health care system and ways that we can improve it and make it work for everyone.

The author is very engaging and personable, even when he is explaining the ins and outs of laboratory science. Anyone can read this book and walk away with a good understanding of the subjects in the book.

I commend Dr. Saag for writing this book and for all of the hard work he's put in to help those with HIV and AIDS. I highly recommend this book to anyone.

Stephen Russell says

Good writing, like good medicine, starts with finding the true narrative in the facts before you. Like he has done for three decades in the world of medicine, Saag enters the world of writing as a raconteur of the first order. He recalls the dark days of HIV medicine, when the disease was diagnosed based on a demographic, and recounts the harrowing reality of well-meaning providers with no tools to treat their patients. But he finds the light before the dawn in research, and retells his own part of bringing those discoveries directly to his patients. Looking back from the comfortable couch of 2014, it is easy to forget that this chronic disease we call HIV used to be a disease to be feared, not managed. Of the many characters who appear in his narrative, none encapsulates the power of hope like the unforgettable patient nicknamed Pearly James. In this one man's willingness to try the next best thing in AIDS medical management, he rose above the certain death sentence of his diagnosis to become a shining example of what a willing team, and collaborative partnership, can mean in the lives of individual patients. The reader is left with a resounding sense of hope and an outlook for the future of HIV that is nothing short of positive.

Debra Goldstein says

Summary provided by the book is accurate:

Positive traces the life of Michael S. Saag, MD, an internationally known expert on the virus that causes AIDS, but the book is more than a memoir: through his story, Dr. Saag also shines a light on the dysfunctional US healthcare system, proposing optimistic yet realistic remedies drawn from his distinguished medical career.

Positive is Dr. Saag's tribute to the unforgettable patients he has known and an urgent call to create a comprehensive, compassionate, accessible healthcare system in the name of those we can save today.

For those interested in the history of the medical war against AIDS and the problems with the medical System, Positive is an honest appraisal and portrayal of both.
