

HENRY G. SHEPPARD



Haematemesis

How One Man Overcame a Fear of Things Medical
and Learned to Navigate His Way Around Hospital

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This book relates the journey of a medical innocent through the wilds of the hospital system. It is a comic account of life on the business side of the medical looking glass, written to encourage others as they face the uncertainties of life in the hands of modern-day medical practitioners.

Haematemesis: How One Man Overcame a Fear of Things Medical and Learned to Navigate His Way Around Hospital Details

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From Reader Review Haematemesis: How One Man Overcame a Fear of Things Medical and Learned to Navigate His Way Around Hospital for online ebook

Kaylin (The Re-Read Queen) says

(deviating from my usual review format because reasons)

Overall, I found this to be a very poor representation of medicine and in-patient facilities. ***Please stop perpetuating the us vs them mentality between patients and medical professionals***

Okay, Goodreads. I received this book from the author in exchange for an honest review. That makes this next bit difficult. I wanted to like this—I really did! I think if I'd read this two or three years ago, I might have.

But in the last three years, two things have happened to me. First, I started working as a medical professional myself. I'm certainly not high up the food-chain, but I do work in an average-sized Emergency Room and on an ambulance. Both of my jobs involve interacting with patients as well as providing interventions/treatment consistent with my level of certification.

The second thing is that I was diagnosed with a somewhat rare genetic disorder. My diagnosis came after months of searching for answers and after my symptoms impeded my ability to work, go to school and continue with everyday life. I am quite lucky in the regards that my symptoms can be rather easily managed with medication, but before diagnosis I did spend several months undergoing different tests and have my fair share of ER visits and hospital stays. I am *in no way trying to make comparisons* between my experience and Sheppard's. Everyone's health and treatment is unique and personal to them.

TMI? Okay probably. But my point here is that in the last two years, I have been on both sides of the equation.

Several times in this text, Sheppard refers to times he was stuck multiple times as people attempted to find a vein for an IV. At one point he states:

“My worst experience was the time two nurses required five attempts between them to insert one needle correctly.”

Again, I've been on both sides of this equation. I recently underwent a procedure that required multiple blood-draws from a large bore IV and it took thirteen attempts before an IV was stuck. I have also stuck a little-old-lady five times attempting to find a vein. It happens. It's completely frustrating and somewhat painful. But it's not done with malicious intent, and it in no-way means the nurse/tech/doctor sticking you is

incompetent.

“It was a special kind of needle called a ‘cannula.’ Once inserted, the sharpened steel part was removed, leaving a tiny, thin, flexible tube inside the vein, which was then taped in place.”

This is literally every IV ever. For most IV’s this section of “sharpened steel” will be less than 1/16th of an inch (with 1/20th or 1/22 being most common) in diameter.

Throughout this story, Sheppard illustrates several encounters with nurses or doctors where he felt he was mistreated or ignored. He recounts these details in depth and with funny anecdotes, and it is very much the basis of the book. On the other hand, his discussions with medical professionals he felt were pleasant were reduced to a sentences here and there throughout the novel.

I am not saying Sheppard was not mistreated. I am not saying he wasn’t ignored. I am not saying he didn’t have reason to be angry and frustrated. But the tone of this book was overall incredibly demeaning and negative towards the institution of medicine as a whole.

At the end of the day, medical professionals are just people. I will not make excuses for anyone’s mistreatment of the author, but to lump all of these professionals into one negative category seems distasteful.

There were several points in the story where the author claimed certain treatments or policies were being obeyed/disregarded because of money. He claims several times that he was put through certain ordeals simply due to how much money the hospital and professionals earn of them. I don’t know where he was treated or how insurance/medical billing works there, so I won’t argue against that. (Even though that’s *not* how things are where I am). But Sheppard has no basis for these claims. He seems to have done very little research into these processes himself as well as billing and coding. His claims seem grandiose and akin to an old-man shaking his fist at the sky.

When admitted to the hospital Sheppard is horrified to find the nurses expect to “take control” of his daily doses of his diabetes medication. He argues he should be allowed to regulate his own dosages the way he has at home for several years. It’s portrayed as a humorous argument between Sheppard and a nurse, and I’m very clearly supposed to root for Sheppard. But I don’t quite think he fully understood the implications of what he was asking.

The human body doesn’t work in a bunch of separate systems we learned in middle school. Instead, these systems all work together and all affect one another. Though he was admitted for anemia and so he could undergo blood transfusions, that doesn’t mean any of these treatments wouldn’t have affected his blood sugar levels. Medications interact with each other. Large quantities of fluid interact with different parts of the body (especially kidney function and insulin levels). He was not looking at his own lab results, nor was he trained to understand those lab results and make informed decisions from them. Someone certainly should have explained this to him. Just as I believe someone should have spoken with him in-depth about his lab results and dosages of medications. But I don’t feel any part of the doctors and nurses not wanting him to regulate these things himself was due to “control.”

Back to my main point: Can we please stop with the horror stories of medicine?

A patient needs to be aware of their agency and their ability to make decisions. Absolutely. A patient should always be able to ask questions and should be able to make decisions regarding their care.

But giving a patient this agency doesn't need to involve taking it away from medical professionals. These people have gone to school for sometimes decades to learn this stuff and most of them wouldn't have gone into the field if they didn't want to help people.

People need to be able to trust their nurses and doctors. I'm not saying don't ask for second opinions, or to blindly follow instructions. But if someone refuses or delays potentially life-saving treatment simply because they don't trust their doctor or nurse, the results could be catastrophic. Or if someone disregards a doctor or nurses warning when it comes to medications. If someone ignores their doctors follow-up instructions.

... I could go on. These are all very important things that require a level of trust from both medical professional and patient. This book seemed cynical and used humor to mock that trust.

I understand this is an incredibly personal book, and though it was done with much gusto and humor, I imagine it took Sheppard a lot of courage to put this story out there. I think the writing itself was fairly strong and that Sheppard is a very funny individual. I sincerely hope he writes more books.

I also hope medicine and treatment can be seen as a dialogue between medical professionals and patients, rather than a competition.

Rory Wilding says

The term “cancer is funny” is not something many of us would like to hear and yet there have stories, fact and fiction, from cancer survivors who have made fun of their own traumatic experiences. You get exactly that with the third novel from Australian author Henry G. Sheppard.

As the subtitle *How One Man Overcame a Fear of Things Medical and Learned to Navigate Around Hospital* suggests, it comically chronicles Sheppard's journey as a medical innocent through the wilds of the hospital system.

What could've been a sad story about a man fighting for his life against the horrors of leukaemia, Sheppard takes something tragic and turns into a comedic tale as a man who has been through chemotherapy before, has to do it again and again, much to his annoyance.

For a book that delves into the hospital system, it is never consumed by the medical jargon as Sheppard, who may not shy away from describing the emotional and physical pain he went through, how he makes fun of those moments with his pop culture references and the funny pseudonyms he gives to the numerous hospital staff members are spot-on.

No doubt cancer can be a sensitive subject when explored for the purposes of comedy as you can be insultingly sentimental or honestly funny. Henry G. Sheppard achieves the latter as *Haematemesis* has an uplifting message about fighting one's demons in all shapes and forms.

I would like to thank the author who provided a PDF version of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Amber says

I received a free copy of this ebook from the author in exchange for an honest review.

When Henry gets sick, he begins his hilarious adventure into the world of the hospital examinations and his terrifying encounters with the not so nice hospital staff. Will he survive? Read on and find out for yourself.

This was a pretty good and funny non-fiction book. If you enjoy funny books about people overcoming their fears in the hospital, definitely check out this book. It is available wherever books are sold online.

Sofia says

When my friend Irina asked me to read this with her I was hesitant because of the subject matter but hey, I could but try. The subject remains hard but the writing thus the reading of this little piece certainly wasn't.

Sheppard goes out to battle his returning leukemia armed with his wits and his humour which he transmitted here and I enjoyed his writing and admire his outlook on life and it's tribulations. Tribulations which non of us are proofed against. Non of us is deathproof and Sheppard breaks the silence that seems to surround cancer care and takes us with him whilst he is being treated. I'm not Australian so I go to different hospitals but he still had me nodding and laughing at some of the character portraits which seem to be part and parcel of care-work all over the world.

I read this in an hour or so and it was time well spent as it added a perspective I want to have with me in any of my future dealings.

Michael says

Who would ever think a book about a man going through treatment for leukaemia in Australia's Public Health system could be so hilariously funny. Despite facing at times grim news about his prospects, Henry G. Sheppard will take the old adage that laughter is the best medicine to a whole new level. The amount of times I laughed at the names he was giving medical people was numerous and I could not help but think what he would refer to me, as someone who works in a public hospital. With a humour that had shades of John Cleese with wry self-deprecation and enough pop culture references to sink a ship, *Haematemesis* is a quality read for anyone who is working in health care. Just a word of advice though, you may not want to read it on public transport as you will most likely have everyone staring at you as you laugh uncontrollably.

Vicki says

This book was exactly as it presented its self to be. One man's journey in a hospital. There was humor and out and out laughter. This short read was enjoyable while of course, I feel for his diagnosis and his prognosis. I have spent a few days in a hospital and I recognized some of the nurses, procedures and missed meals.

Vanessa says

Given a free copy to read and review, my interest was peaked due to having a family member currently undergoing cancer treatment and enduring a prolonged hospital stay it was good to get a birds eye view from someone who's been through it all and lived to tell the tale. You don't always get the bare honest truth from someone going through treatment as most people try to sugarcoat the experience so it was definately an eye opener with lots of sharp witty observations of the many medical procedures that take place. This was an insightful yet amusing take on the whole process of being a patient, not always pretty but very accurate portrayal. It's a fun read in a very unfunny situation. Recommended for anyone going through or dealing with someone going through a similar ordeal.

Henry Sheppard says

Wonderfully funny reading!

Margaret says

I was given a copy of this book by the author in exchange for an honest review.

I will be brutally honest. This book is brilliant!

It charts Henry's dealing with a second bout of leukemia he suffered and the ramifications of it. The subject is dealt with with a combination of brutal honesty and a twisted sense of humour.

I was literally crying with laughter reading some parts. And then felt awful for laughing at poor Henry's battle for life.

It's a short book, only around a 100 pages, but I recommend that anyone who knows someone going through chemotherapy should read it. It will give you an understanding of the process. It will also make you laugh. A lot.

Veronica ?? says

I had no idea of the meaning of Haematemesis, but thank you to the author for remedying that within the first

few pages. I can't get that image out of my head!!

Sheppard relates his chemotherapy journey with wit, humour and candour. I wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

I did feel slightly irreverent laughing at this life threatening disease and its treatment. However, the humour aside, I have actually learnt a great deal about the tribulations of those receiving cancer treatments.

Sheppard's story has been a timely eye-opener for me as my step-father is about to embark on his third course of treatment.

I would recommend this story to everyone in the health system and anyone who has a friend or relative undergoing treatment.

I received a copy from the author and chose to write a review.

Marianne says

Haematemesis is the third book by Australian author, Henry G. Sheppard. Henry relates his personal experience through two rounds of chemotherapy for leukaemia in the Public Health system. Henry's account could have been depressing and dull, but the way he relates his experiences is so full of humour and self-deprecation, that the result is hilarious and unfortunately, quite true to life. Those who work in the Health Services will be nodding in agreement and recognition as they read; those who have experienced it from the other side, the receiving side, will certainly empathise. It's a short read that is honest and very funny. This story, written from the perspective of the patient/health consumer, ought to be compulsory reading for anyone involved in the field of oncology, and recommended for anyone working in Health Services in any capacity.

With thanks to the author who provided this copy in exchange for an honest review.

Rebecca says

This is a mordantly funny account of one Australian man's experience with recurrent cancer. In remission since 2007, Sheppard discovered in 2015 that he was once more riddled—that awful word—with leukemia. Having vowed never to go through chemo again, he learned that it had somewhat improved in the intervening years, with the drip treatments now partially replaced by tablets. This time around he ran into a lot of what he calls "Big Hospital Attitude": scheduling issues with his bone marrow biopsy, nurses who didn't think he could manage his own insulin treatments, and constant problems with finding veins for his many injections. Was this the much-touted "Patient-Centered Care"? Would he be better off with the "quick and relatively-painless death offered when one is mauled by a pack of wild dogs"?

"Haematemesis" means vomiting blood, and be warned: there is a lot of blood here; if you're squeamish about needles you may struggle. There is also plenty of scatological humor. But in general I found the tone to be reminiscent of Bill Bryson in a hospital gown, especially when he's describing squeezing his belly into a

CT scanner or recounting his flatulence.

My main complaint is that at 80 pages this feels incomplete, like it's telling just part of the story. What about his first bout with leukemia, or his earlier life (which, from a look at his Goodreads biography, seems very eventful indeed)? I understand that Sheppard wanted to get this book released while he was still able. I wish him well and hope for a sequel.

My thanks to the author for the free e-copy for review.

Originally published on my blog, Bookish Beck.

Ikebukuro says

A scary and funny experience of the public hospital in Australia but also an experience to describe how we are able to understand a world that is often completely bizarre and frightful before we are confronted to the illness ourselves. In this book of about one hundred pages, Henry G Sheppard describes with humor his journey through the intricacies of the disease: the announcement of his leukemia, the appointments with medical staff, the hospital bureaucracy, the examinations of any kind, the analyzes and treatments.

Funny, touching or annoying if you have to resume the appointment canceled by mistake, the author never falls into pathos or the maudlin. I loved this book which plays down the disease through funny situations and derision. The author observes and describes this little world with humor, without malice even if we feel that sometimes medical staff can forget the human being behind the patient. This book could be dark and sad and that's the opposite, I've smiled, I've even laughed sometimes. It's an optimistic book which may help some to fight against their fear of the hospital. Humor can also be a therapy to fight against fear, against dark thoughts, against depression and denial. Thanks for sharing this experience with us!

En français :

L'expérience effrayante et drôle de l'hôpital public en Australie ou comment appréhender un monde qui nous est souvent complètement étranger avant que l'on ne soit confronté soi-même à la maladie. Dans ce livre d'une centaine de pages, Henry G Sheppard nous raconte avec humour son voyage à travers les méandres de la maladie : l'annonce de sa leucémie, les prises de RDV, la bureaucratie hospitalière, les examens de toute sorte, les analyses et les traitements. C'est drôle, émouvant, énervant aussi quand il faut reprendre des RDV annulés par mégarde, on ne tombe jamais dans le pathos ou dans le larmoyant. J'ai beaucoup aimé ce livre qui dédramatise la maladie à travers l'humour et la dérision. L'auteur observe et décrit ce petit monde avec humour, sans méchanceté même si l'on sent parfois que le personnel médical peut oublier l'être humain derrière le patient. C'est un livre qui aurait pu être sombre et triste et qui est tout le contraire, j'ai beaucoup souri, j'ai même ri par moment. C'est un livre optimiste qui fait du bien et qui je pense peut aider certains à lutter contre leur peur de l'hôpital. Finalement l'humour peut aussi être une thérapie pour lutter contre la peur, contre les idées noires, contre la déprime et le renoncement.

Ola says

I got this book from the author in exchange for an honest review. And because I got this from the author it

makes it especially hard for me to give it such a low rating, but I just didn't like this book at all. And the deal was that I will give it an honest review, so here it is.

It is a story of a man that has to go through another painful way of chemotherapy after he is diagnosed with cancer. The author is delivering this story in a way that is supposed to be funny, but for me, it just wasn't. I didn't laugh once. The book just felt like ramblings of an older man on a horrible healthcare system that is trying its best to ruin his health. In a few cases, these ramblings were understandable because some of the situations were truly ridiculous. Another thing that had a huge impact on me not liking this book are racists remarks about the hospital professionals, like calling them 'china doll' and 'trained panda'. Not cool... The only thing I liked about this book is that is it so short, and I could finish it quickly.

Matt says

First and foremost, a large thank you to the author for providing me with a copy of this book, as he seeks an honest review.

While serious disease is no laughing matter, Henry Sheppard seeks to inject some humour into his trials and tribulations as a patient suffering from leukaemia a second time. After significant time in remission, Sheppard finds himself again invaded with cancer and must face another battle, one with which he is familiar. While the experience itself is not 'fun', Sheppard seeks to take a lighter approach, using his past knowledge to infuse some humour, where he can as he offers a narrative of the ordeal for the receptive reader. From an oncologist who will not buy his excuse that chemotherapy is not for him because it is uncomfortable to a botched biopsy appointment to determine the inevitable leukaemia diagnosis through to the dread of treatment thereafter, Sheppard offers the reader an insight into his battle with this sinister disease. Capturing some of the truly daunting aspects of cancer treatment, Sheppard seeks to lead the reader through the rocky adventure as smoothly as possible, while not removing some of the less heartwarming moments. Leaving the door open to the final result of the treatment forces the reader to guess or hope for a good outcome. Anyone who has dealt with cancer will know that it is not only an unwelcome but also a lingering guest, one that leaves many to ponder changing the locks and adding black out curtains. A decent read to deflect from the horrors of cancer and leave the reader chuckling or at least shaking their head.

With a personal connection to cancer, I was not sure how I wanted to approach reading this. Knowing that I was doing the author a favour, I forged ahead, but rarely saw 'cancer' and 'funny' in the same sentence. However, as I began, I was able to see that Sheppard sought not to deny the negative aspects of cancer and its treatment, but to distract from the negative side, as a photographer would with a rubber duck towards a stubborn toddler. Laughter is a medicine that can only be injected if accepted, unlike many other medicaments that will help the patient, though Sheppard's dry wit makes it hard not to see at least something humorous in the entire process. By being able to laugh at the horrors of fecal deposits or the fear of being lodged inside a CT scanner because of blubber excesses, the reader can see that this is a way to exit reality or at least take things from another perspective. Sheppard uses a number of interesting characters throughout his tale, though in some cases the non-fiction nature of the piece shines through, as no one could make up these sorts of people. Between that and the relatively fast-pace nature of the process, Sheppard is able to offer a microcosm of the war in a lighthearted and digestible fashion. I did find myself chuckling at times, sure that these moments would elicit a completely different sentiment if I were on the other end of the procedure. Short enough and crafted with enough medical references as to offer the reader a well-grounded look into cancer diagnosis and treatment, this piece can be synthesised in just over an hour or two without

trouble.

Well done, Mr. Sheppard, as I can see you want to educate as well as entertain. I hope cancer patients and their families find solace in seeing that there is something on the other side of the storm clouds about which to laugh.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:

<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>
