

The Healers: The Rise of the Medical Establishment

by John Duffy



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I don't think I'll ever view the medical profession the same way I did before reading this book. **The Healers** does what only history can do - it tells the truth about beauty. In this case, it strips the profession of its aura, letting the reader see some of the dirty laundry (George Washington's physicians, for example), as well as its heroes (or heroines as the case may be for medical education reformers). It certainly helps to put managed care, technology, money and the profession in perspective. It's a timeless treasure in my opinion.

It was a little like finding out that your ancestors weren't quite as lily-white as legend has made them out to be. Self-trained doctors were the norm in the 1800's. I recently ran across a standard book used for self-study during that period at an antique bookstore. It was about six inches thick. Scary! Being a physician back then carried nothing of the status of physicians today. It was difficult to discern between those who were competent and those who weren't. And even the most competent were pretty inconsistent in achieving good results.

Yes, we've come a long way in the medical profession, but in another sense, we have a long way to go. I was struck by how the public health challenges of a hundred years ago were similar to those found today. We're not battling yellow fever anymore, but the challenges of social illnesses like STDs, alcoholism and drug abuse are just as daunting, if not more daunting. With all our technology and scientific advances, have we really learned much?

I bought this out-of-print book at my local library for a buck, but you can still get a used copy at www.Amazon.com.