



Body of Knowledge: One Semester of Gross Anatomy, the Gateway to Becoming a Doctor

Steven Giegerich

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A fascinating exploration of the medical student's most decisive course -- gross anatomy -- and of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual transformation that turns young men and women into doctors. Medical Gross and Developmental Anatomy is a course every medical student dreads. As one future physician told the author, Steve Giegerich, passing the notoriously difficult course is "paying your dues for medicine. It's the bridge you have to cross if you want to become a doctor." More students leave medical school during this course than any other. Now "Body of Knowledge" puts readers in the classroom as potential doctors come face-to-face with their first human cadaver and dissects the factors that determine whether they succeed or fail. In January 1999, 181 students at the University of Medicine and Dentistry, Newark, began a course in gross anatomy. Among them were Sherry Ikalowych, a former nurse and mother of four; Jennifer Hannum, an ultracompetitive jock; Udele Tagoe, a determined Duke graduate of Ghanaian descent; and Ivan Gonzalez, a Nicaraguan refugee and unlikely medical student. For these four lab partners, Tom Lewis, the cadaver lying on the stainless steel table, remains anonymous during dissection; but for the reader, Lewis springs to life. As the students grapple with love, hate, power and awe, Giegerich explores Lewis's life and his generous decision to donate his body to science. Ultimately, as the students gain reverence for medicine, they too develop gratitude for Lewis's thoughtful gift.

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