

Review: *Caroline Elton Helps Doctors Heal Themselves*
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* All quotes are from the reviewed article unless otherwise specified.

Claudia Dreifus's 2019 article reviews the book *Also Human: The Inner Lives of Doctors* by Caroline Elton. Dr. Elton is a psychologist specializing in physicians suffering from burnout. While the depersonalization of patient care has become a popular topic in the lay press, little has been published about the dehumanization of physicians outside of our own peer-reviewed scientific literature.

A variety of issues result in higher rates of anxiety and depression than the general population. "The sheer number of people they must see every day" demoralizes many physicians, making many of them feel like they "can't be the doctors they wish to be." Data suggest that these stressors can result in worse patient outcomes and lower patient satisfaction scores. While the medical field has always been stressful, Dr. Elton argues that these stressors are magnified and compounded in the internet era, where patients are more likely to be "overly demanding and sometimes even unrealistic about what can be done."

The first step in re-humanizing a physician is to determine if the issue is intrinsic (related to a personality or psychological problem inherent to that physician) or extrinsic (a system problem). Dr. Elton guides her patients through this decision tree in hopes of finding "the smallest change for the greatest psychological gain." Some physicians might redirect their efforts into research or administrative responsibilities. Others might find a comparable job in a different setting. Still others might transition to another specialty. If severe, physicians might seek help from a psychiatrist or leave the medical field altogether.

Physicians are well trained to recognize and manage disease or sickness in someone else. We classically do not deal well with personal illness. "Doctors are not supposed to get sick." Dr. Elton's argument is that we cannot properly provide patient care if we do not have a healthy doctor-patient relationship. The needs of all parties must be considered and met in order for that relationship to thrive. We must improve our ability to recognize stress and burnout in ourselves and our colleagues. Early identification can minimize the negative effects of burnout on both the physician and their patients. Physician, heal thyself so that you may heal others.