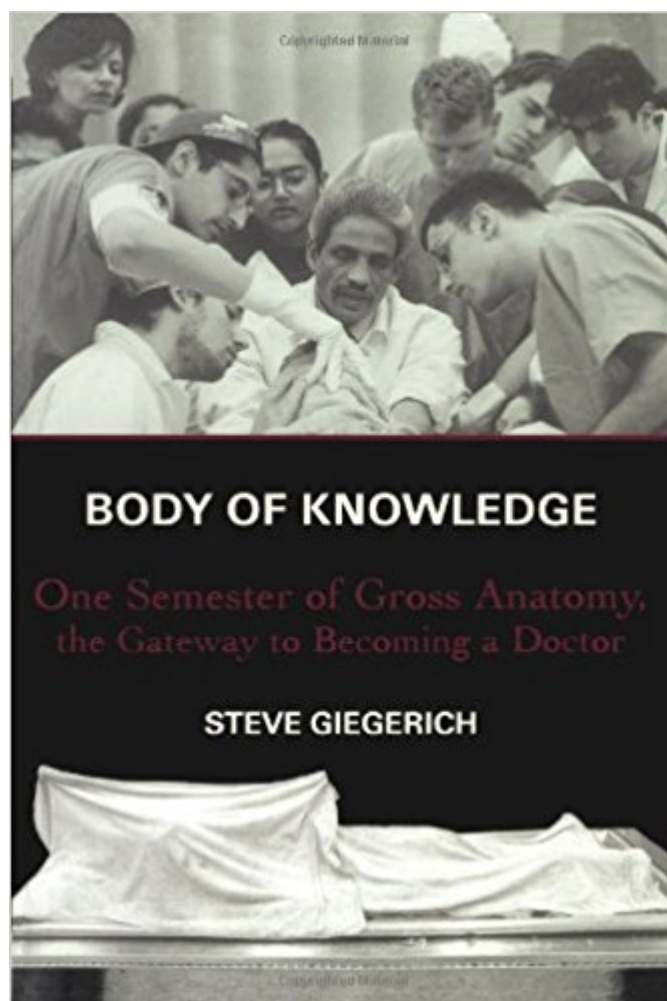


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Body Of Knowledge: One Semester Of Gross Anatomy, The Gateway To Becoming A Doctor



Synopsis

Medical Gross and Developmental Anatomy is the course every medical student dreads. As one aspiring physician described it to journalist-author Steve Giegerich, "it's the bridge you have to cross if you want to become a doctor." Four lab partners facing that notoriously difficult course at Newark's University of Medicine and Dentistry are Sherry Ikalowych, a former nurse and mother of four; Jennifer Hannum, an ultracompetitive jock; Udele Tagoe, a determined Duke graduate of Ghanian descent; and Ivan Gonzalez, a Nicaraguan refugee and unlikely medical student. This lively chronicle of each of their ambitions, failures, and successes has at its center Tom Lewis, the cadaver lying before them to be dissected. From their first face-to-face encounter with Lewis as an anonymous cadaver on the stainless steel table to a rich reverence for Lewis's generous donation of his body to science, what they each learn about medicine, compassion, life, and death makes for a fascinating insiders' account of the shaping of a medical professional.

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Customer Reviews

In 1999, journalist Giegerich accompanied four medical students at Newark's University of Medicine and Dentistry through a semester of gross anatomy, the pivotal course that brings first-year students face-to-face with a human cadaver. Those months in the lab, as well as considerable secondary research on physiology and the history of anatomy, have borne fruit in this sensitive, provocative book. A number of excellent medical school memoirs already exist, such as William Nolen's classic *The Making of a Surgeon* and Perri Klass's more recent *A Not Entirely Benign Procedure*. Nolen

and Klass have the advantage of firsthand insight, but neither zeroes in on so novel and so critical an aspect of the medical school experience as Giegerich does. His observer status, by no means a handicap, allows him to sketch impassively yet compassionately the divergent lives of his four subjects, and his excellent reportage delivers the psychological and emotional trials of gross anatomy with razor precision. Novel also is Giegerich's account of the once-living person who shares this journey, Tom Lewis, a public school administrator and ardent Roman Catholic who donates his body to science. The reader comes to know him well, but to the anatomists, who must rely on the scalpel and their own wits to learn his identity, he is simply cadaver #3426. Giegerich makes a strong case for gifts to science by showing how Tom, a social activist while he was alive, profoundly affects the lives of these four medical students after he is dead. Like Nolen's classic memoir, Giegerich's sensitive study will be essential reading for anyone considering a career in medicine. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Completing the freshman course, Medical Gross and Developmental Anatomy (GA), is one of the first bridges one crosses to become a physician. Journalist Giegerich succeeds admirably in taking readers through the five units of GA (head and neck, thorax, abdomen, and upper and lower extremities) at Newark's University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey so that the curious emerge with their imaginations satiated, their hands clean and odor free, but, alas, sans medical degree. Giegerich introduces the body donor, the embalmer, the school secretary who arranges for body donations, the students, and the anatomy faculty, letting us share in the experience all the way up to the memorial service that terminates the course before the dissected cadavers are sent to the crematory. Depending on his or her disposition, the reader is likely to be mesmerized, appalled, or emotionally depleted by these comprehensive and engrossing insights into the first-year med student's exposure to the complexity of the human body with its myriad Latinized structures, the unremitting pressures of memorization and ever-present exams, and a sprinkling of "cadaver juice" and practical jokes added to ease the tension. Human dissection is a fascinating and complex topic, and Meryl Levin's *Anatomy of Anatomy* (Third Rail, 2000) provides a pictorial complement to Giegerich's compelling text. For popular medical collections. James Swanton, Harlem Hosp. Lib., New York Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a great book. It was a required reading for a gross anatomy course, and I have to say that I

loved it. It offers a really neat perspective that I could get into as well as relate (being the anatomy student in a cadaver course). It not only gives you the experiences of the people in the gross anatomy lab, but also all the people who are behind the scenes of it all. This book offers insight from the mortician, the secretary in charge of all of the paperwork, the students in the gross anatomy program and then some. I enjoyed and was surprised that there was so much information about the man who became the cadaver in anatomy lab. The book talks about his reasons for donating his body, his family, and the works. It is pretty incredible.

Fascinating, beautifully written account of a group of Med Students as they face their Gross Anatomy Class. Up close & personal. Varying responses & awe. Knowledge of the body/life they are dissecting, humanizes the experience in an honoring and respectful way. Sensitive, thought provoking and inspiring!

Purchased this for my daughter who is starting med school, she informed me the book was eye opening and content rich.

Realistic portrayal of medical school. the importance of donating your body for research. An intimate look into the life of a person who did just that and the family he left behind.

This is a thorough account of a semester studying gross anatomy at a New Jersey medical school in the late 1990s, written largely from the position of the author observing four students as they dissect a donated cadaver in its near-entirety. Steve Giegerich, has chosen to write 'Body Of Knowledge' as an invisible narrator: at no point does he use the word 'I' other than in the acknowledgements, nor does he express his reaction to what he is seeing. As a writer, I respect this decision greatly, as I would find it extremely difficult to maintain this distance throughout an entire book. However, I don't think Giegerich's absence from the story helps the reader. For me, it hindered my understanding and appreciation of what he was describing, because I kept wondering what was going on in his head. My other big issue with the story structure is that the author introduces the pseudonymous body donor, "Thomas Lewis", far too soon in the story: chapter three, before the four medical students had even met the cadaver they'd be dissecting all semester. Giegerich thus devotes many thousands of words to "Thomas Lewis" before I'd built any emotional attachment to him, and thus I found myself turning pages to get past the excessive biographical details of a man I didn't care about at that point in the book. I'd have much prefer that he'd kept that

reveal until later, or sprinkled the donor's details in short vignettes throughout the book. And finally, the author occasionally lapsed into overly florid and verbose prose: there was one sentence in particular which had in excess of 60 words. (I stopped counting.) Not sure how that got past his editor. All these complaints aside, 'Body Of Knowledge' is a good book, and I'm glad I read it. I'm being overly critical because I'm writing on a similar topic at the moment, and this just didn't hit the right notes for me, as a casual reader and as a journalist. But I can imagine this would be fascinating for any would-be or current medical students, as Giegerich's depth and breadth of reportage is highly commendable.

I picked this book up and was fascinated from the first paragraph -- that's not to say that everyone will be. Indeed, some readers may be shocked and dismayed at the explicit detail offered and the emotional twists and turns that the medical students encounter as they dissect the human body assigned to them. However, there's a factual, but caring, human interest element to this book that will pull many reader into the narrative. The author has obviously used his accomplished journalism skills to interview the students, medical school faculty, families and lab staff involved in the Gross Anatomy course and then carefully wove the stories -- along with an enormous amount of background research -- together into this exceptional chronological narrative. For three and a half months, readers are given the opportunity to observe and listen to four students assigned to table 26 and their classmates and faculty in the Gross Anatomy Lab of Newark's New Jersey Medical School. One has a sense that the reader is standing right next to them as they deal with the physical, mental, and psychological challenges of dissecting a corpse that was once a living human being. It's not a morbid story at all; if anything, it's a story that honors the sanctity of human life and explains the necessity of medical students learning as much as possible about our bodies -- through dissection -- so they can go forth and heal others. The author, Steve Giegerich, is a reporter who has served as an adjunct instructor at Rutgers and Columbia University's journalism schools and was an Associated Press National Reporting Team finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 1998. Highly recommended for public, academic and medical libraries. R. Neil Scott
Middle Tennessee State University

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