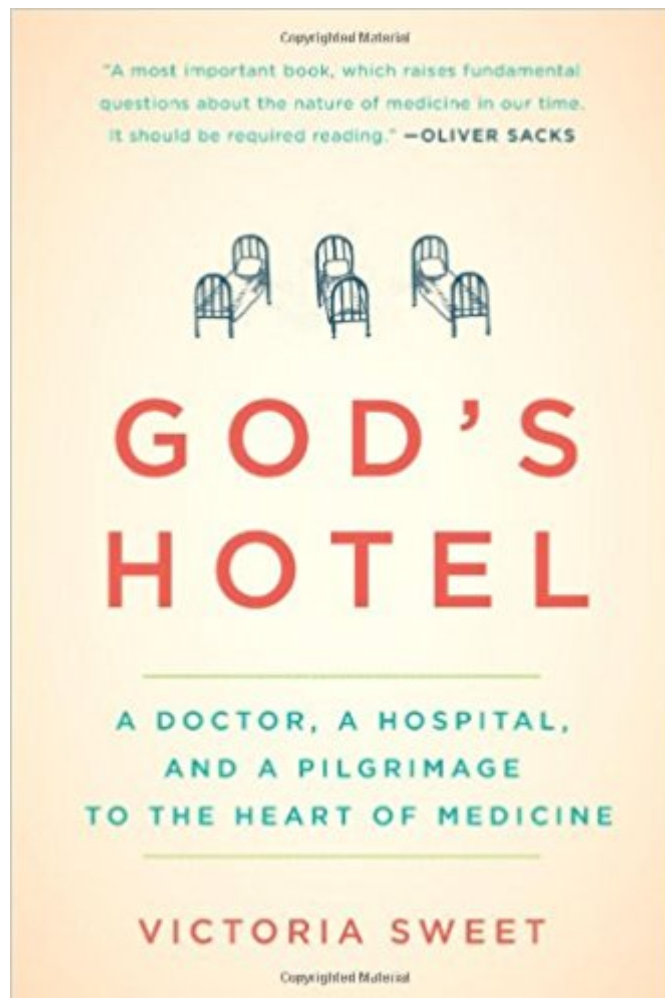




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God's Hotel: A Doctor, A Hospital, And A Pilgrimage To The Heart Of Medicine



Synopsis

For readers of Paul Kalanithi's *When Breath Becomes Air*, a medical "page-turner" that traces one doctor's remarkable journey to the essence of medicine (The San Francisco Chronicle). A San Francisco Laguna Honda Hospital is the last almshouse in the country, a descendant of the Hôpital-Dieu (God's hotel) that cared for the sick in the Middle Ages. Ballet dancers and rock musicians, professors and thieves—anyone who had fallen, or, often, leapt, onto hard times and needed extended medical care—ended up here. So did Victoria Sweet, who came for two months and stayed for twenty years. Laguna Honda, relatively low-tech but human-paced, gave Sweet the opportunity to practice a kind of attentive medicine that has almost vanished. Gradually, the place transformed the way she understood her work. Alongside the modern view of the body as a machine to be fixed, her extraordinary patients evoked an older idea, of the body as a garden to be tended. *God's Hotel* tells their story and the story of the hospital itself, which, as efficiency experts, politicians, and architects descended, determined to turn it into a modern "health care facility," revealed its own surprising truths about the essence, cost, and value of caring for the body and the soul.

Book Information

Hardcover: 384 pages

Publisher: Riverhead Books; 1 edition (April 26, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1594488436

ISBN-13: 978-1594488436

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.2 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 432 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #248,071 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Textbooks >

Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Special Topics > Essays #110 in Books >

Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Administration & Policy > Health Policy #128

in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Administration & Policy > Hospital Administration & Care

Customer Reviews

A Barnes & Noble and San Francisco Chronicle Best Nonfiction Book of

2012) "Transcendent" | readable chapters go down like restorative sips of cool water, and its hard-core subversion cheers like a shot of gin | God's Hotel [is] a tour de force | Others have written about the relationship between time and medical care with similar eloquence and urgency, but the centuries of perspective that Dr. Sweet brings infuse the point with unforgettable clarity. "The New York Times" "A radical and inspiring alternative vision of caring for the sick." "Vanity Fair" "Engaging" | You might not expect a book about San Francisco's most downtrodden patients to be a page-turner, but it is. With its colorful cast of characters battling the tide of history, God's Hotel is a remarkable journey into the essence of medicine. "San Francisco Chronicle" "Victoria Sweet writes beautifully about the enormous richness of life at Laguna Honda, the chronic [care] hospital where she has spent the last twenty years, and the intense sense of place and community that binds patients and staff there. Such community in the medical world is vanishingly rare now, and Laguna Honda may be the last of its kind" | God's Hotel is a most important book which raises fundamental questions about the nature of medicine in our time. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the 'business' of healthcare and especially those interested in the humanity of healthcare." "Oliver Sacks, M.D. author of The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and The Mind's Eye" "A beautifully written and illuminating book" | [Sweet's] metaphors are poetic and hint at the mystical, but then she pulls back with the educated eye of a scientist | For both the agnostic and the believer, Sweet pinpoints the element of medicine that makes it a calling rather than a job: the unique and sustaining love that is sparked between a doctor and patient. "Jerome Groopman, The New York Review of Books" "Remarkable" | [Sweet] would appreciate that it took time for me to journey to and through her work since that may be one of the many compelling messages she so eloquently, yet simply by storytelling, conveys | permitting "Ætincture of time" to also do its job." "The Huffington Post" "Sweet's warm, anecdotal style shines" | The author's compelling argument for Laguna Honda's philosophy of 'slow medicine' will make readers contemplate if perhaps the body should be viewed more as a garden to be tended rather than a machine to be fixed." "Kirkus (reviewed as a Best Book of 2012)" "Captivating" | with this humane and thoughtful work, Sweet joins physician-authors such as Oliver Sacks, Jerome Groopman and Abraham Verghese. "The Dallas Morning News" "[A] watershed book ... Vital, exquisitely written, and spectacularly multidimensional, Sweet's clinically exacting, psychologically discerning, practical, spiritual, and tenderly funny anecdotal chronicle steers the politicized debate over health

care back to medicine and compassion. [Booklist](#) (starred review) ["Visionary"](#) | thoroughly subversive in all the best ways | This book's lessons and conclusions should challenge doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, and policy makers to stop and rethink their core beliefs. [Journal of Health Affairs](#) ["A remarkable, poignant portrait of a committed physician on a quest to understand the heart, as well as the art, of medicine"](#) | A marvelous, arresting read. [Library Journal](#) (starred review) ["\[Our\] healthcare system might function a lot better if every single American citizen, healthcare professional, politician and legislator would read Victoria Sweet's insightful, beautifully written and moving book."](#)

Victoria Sweet has been a physician at San Francisco's Laguna Honda Hospital for more than twenty years. An associate clinical professor of medicine at University of California, San Francisco, she also holds a Ph.D. in history and social medicine. To learn more about Victoria Sweet and her work, please visit www.victoriasweet.com.

To me, as a retired Family Practice medical doctor, I was rivited by the tales of the "impossibly" hopeless, incurable, indigent community of the poor and helpless people coming to the last "Almshouse" hospital in San Fransisco. The changes that became necessary to that remaining place in the past 20 years or so that provided shelter and care for the lowest echelon of street people, drug addicts, and mentally ill, may have proved to be the end of the last example of the type of medicine sometimes called "slow medicine". This style was based on the centuries-old institution remaining in Paris, France. A style that depended on the basic needs of people who had no other place to go in their life of suffering. The book was detailed and highly researched. No one can say, "Which is the best method to deliver health care," but it would seem much of the soul of medicine has been lost by the change. We have advanced in the science of Medicine, but have we lost the "soul" of the profession? The kind of caring found in the now-extinct "slow medicine" has been subjugated to the laboratory, tests, and highly expensive but accurate methods of examination devoid of feeling. rdpmd 130629

My doctor recommended that I read this book so I decided to purchase it. Money very well spent. A great history of how and why we got to today's method of medical services delivery.

This book hit all aspects of health care. All of us who work in long term care and of special needs

and have the day to day government mandated crap made by those that aren't even working on the floors to be real. Our frustrations..We went into health care for people not paper. The time for the 1:1 patient contact is so much more. ...Those of us who still care do the extra from time to picking up clothes, snacks they love etc...this doctor who told the story of the way the New Health Care system hit it on the head. Us old time care givers are into the people not computers and worrying about covering our tails....A must read. I wish those that are making our new rules in health care really had to work for months in the rules they are making us follow. Get a clue.

A book that can delight you through its entertainments or instruct you with useful knowledge is a good book; one that does both is a great book. Rarely, a book comes along that not only instructs and delights but also deepens your humanity, carving out extra space inside us to carry even more compassion. 'God's Hotel' is such a book. [A hat-tip to Jesse Kornbluth of Head Butler for introducing me to it.]There were many reasons I enjoyed the book, which is really many books at once:-- The author, Dr Victoria Sweet, who has a PhD in medieval history as well as an MD, shares the ancient Latin and Greek etymologies of many terms used in patient care today. Hospitality, community, charity - what do they really mean? Through her stories about her time taking care of patients, Dr Sweet shows how those formed the three foundational principles of Laguna Honda Hospital.-- Dr Sweet interweaves the account of her doctoral research on Hildegard von Bingen in the story. Von Bingen was the original 11th century superwoman: head cleric, builder, farmer, physician, author *and* composer at a time when women weren't allowed much power at all. Dr Sweet applies some of the premodern principles from von Bingen's healing framework to her patients, with encouraging results.-- Dr Sweet describes in great detail and without spite the encroachment of modern medicine with its "efficiencies" into the cozy, personable and strangely effective ways of Laguna Honda, even though there is much to provoke the reader's dismay. The personal, health and financial consequences of cost-cutting, both on patients and staff, turn out to be much higher than the dollars that those measures purport to save. It's a cautionary tale about what medicine can be vs. what it has become, and should be required reading for every medical student.-- And most of all, the stories of the patients. Laguna Honda being a hospital for the care of the indigent - the last almshouse in the US - its patients are people that the good life left behind. The poor, the mentally ill, the unlucky, those with nowhere else to go: these are the patients that Laguna Honda treats equally and without prejudice. Sometimes the patient goes to the brink of death, the 'anima' already halfway in ascent, and turns back. Other times, the patients make miraculous recoveries only to succumb to alcohol or neglect once discharged. These case histories are at once

invigorating, enlightening, infuriating and heartbreaking. They are the human heart of the book. One of the side effects of reading any book is to become partially imbued with the spirit of its author. Reading 'God's Hotel', you get a sense that Dr Victoria Sweet is a deeply thoughtful and compassionate person, and one of the very best kind of caregivers one could hope to have. As a result, this book will not only delight and instruct you, but is also likely to leave you a better human being.-- Ali Binazir, M.D., M.Phil., author of [...], the highest-rated dating self-help book on

This was a lovely, well-written story about what the practice of medicine can look like given time to percolate. The patients of Laguna Honda had nothing but time, and their doctors and nurses did as well. They had time to think about what they were seeing, think about what might be the problem, think of what might be the solution. They had time to try those treatment ideas with the patients they'd built relationships with. The end of the book seems to mark a moving-away from what was, but the lessons taught via slow medicine are useful for any time and place.

Very well written, this book is a journey for us all. And it's a peak into the damage bureaucracy can wreak when it assumes superiority over systems it ought not. Don't get me wrong -- the new hospital sounds lovely, but at what cost? And no, I didn't entirely miss the message of the much larger, much richer tapestry woven by this delightful read. I travelled right along, taking my own pilgrimage of sorts as Victoria Sweet took hers. I could relate to every lesson taught by these unwitting and unlikely teachers. The only thing that was missing for me was the story of Ms. Sweet herself. She's told everyone else's, but little of her own. Sometimes I felt as though the context swirled around her without her having the ability to make any impact, as though she were one of the resident ghosts. If that seems harsh, consider that this is still an almost perfect book, and the criticism is only by way of request. Please, Ms. Sweet, who are you?

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