

Doctors: The History of Scientific Medicine Revealed Through Biography

by Sherwin Nuland, MD

Review by Vincent J Felitti, MD, FACP

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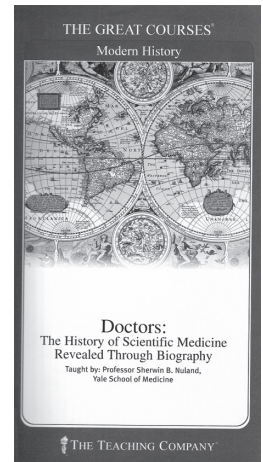
Doctors is a series of twelve half-hour lectures by the Yale surgeon-author, Sherwin Nuland, MD, who is perhaps best known for his best seller, "How We Die." Dr Nuland is also an engaging speaker, here on the history of medicine. At some point in our professional lives, many of us start to wonder how what we know and do originally came into being. This DVD set is as interesting a way to explore the developmental history of our profession as one might imagine.

Doctors starts with Hippocrates and a discussion of his contributions to medicine, which were both clinical-philosophical and ethical. It progresses smoothly and engagingly through a number of major figures to Morgagni, the physician anatomist from Padua, Italy, who, in the 1700s, created a paradigm shift in medical practice by moving us from philosophic explanations of disease (imbalances in the four Humors) to evidence-based explanations. Dr Nuland's discussion of Morgagni's 1705 description of the autopsy findings of a ruptured appendix is

absolutely fascinating; in addition to being clinically vivid, it illustrates how the Psoas Sign came to be used in the diagnosis of appendicitis. Morgagni was a key figure in developing our modern concepts of organ-based disease, an idea that we now take for granted, having forgotten the not-too-distant concept of humoral imbalances. His statement, "Symptoms are the cries of the suffering organs," poses the question, "In what organ is the disease?" His clinical work, only about 300 years ago, was the beginning of detailed physical examination as a way of identifying organ pathology before autopsy.

The 12th and closing biography is the story of the hearing-impaired pediatric cardiologist, Helen Tausig, who developed precordial diagnostic palpation to a high level to compensate for her problems in auscultation. The description of how she conceived the "blue-baby" operation for Tetralogy of Fallot, and then convinced Alfred Blalock and his remarkable surgical technician, Vivien Thomas, to carry it out is the best telling I have heard of this modern medical drama.

The engaging content of *Doctors*, and the fact that The Teaching Company offers a money-back guarantee of satisfaction on its products, makes it of special interest. This and other products from The Teaching Company are often on sale at markedly reduced prices, so it is worth being on their mailing list. ❖



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Vincent J Felitti, MD, FACP, is an Internist in the Department of Preventive Medicine at the Clairemont Mesa Medical Office in San Diego, CA. He is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Diego. He is also an Expert Reviewer for the Medical Board of California. E-mail: vjfmstdca@mac.com

A Good Book

'Tis the good reader that makes the good book.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882, American essayist, philosopher, poet, and leader of the Transcendentalist movement in the early 19th Century