

BOOK REVIEW

Genetic Rounds: A Doctor's Encounters in the Field that Revolutionized Medicine

Author: Robert Marion
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304 pp., \$24.95 hardcover

Genetic Rounds: A Doctor's Encounters in the Field that Revolutionized Medicine is Robert Marion's reflection on 30 years as a clinical geneticist, 30 years that have seen incredible changes in our understanding of the molecular bases of genetic diseases as well as early steps toward the "holy grail"—therapy for genetic disorders. Along the way have been triumphs and disappointments, of both a scientific and of a human nature. Marion chronicles all of this in a straightforward, and often poignant, collection of true stories. Particularly compelling are several stories that describe the pain and pathos of life for some individuals with genetic disorders; the father with Marfan syndrome, so scarred by the emotional trauma of a childhood filled with teasing about his appearance that he chooses not to confide knowledge of his condition with his blind wife for fear that she will not want to have a child with him; or the only family that came to his clinic in the Bronx on September 11, 2001, there not because they needed medical advice but because they needed one human being that they could count on to listen to them and understand their most basic fears and anxieties, one person on whom they could count for help and support.

The triumphs are also well documented and will ring true to clinicians; it is difficult to describe the feeling that something is not quite right with one's patient, or the heady epiphany when a difficult diagnosis becomes clear. These triumphant stories, though, are told with a becoming sense of humility at the wonder of human development. Marion sums this up with a statement with which most clinical geneticists can identify: "dumb luck and hunches, and a little bit of knowledge of weird, rare facts are pretty much all that keep me in business." This is clearly not true, but he expresses an emotion recognizable by every person fortunate enough to spend a lifetime in clinical genetics.

This book is plainly written and should be widely accessible to both medical and nonmedical readers. Researchers in the field of genetics and medicine will gain insight into the human cost of the conditions that they study. The young student reading this book may find in its mix of science and humanism the seeds of a vocation as a geneticist or genetic counselor. We clinicians will be reminded of our own triumphs, and failures, and we might even pick up some clinical pearls that will aid us in the future. Finally, I believe that I will hand this book to my mother the next time she asks me to explain what it is that I actually do for a living.

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