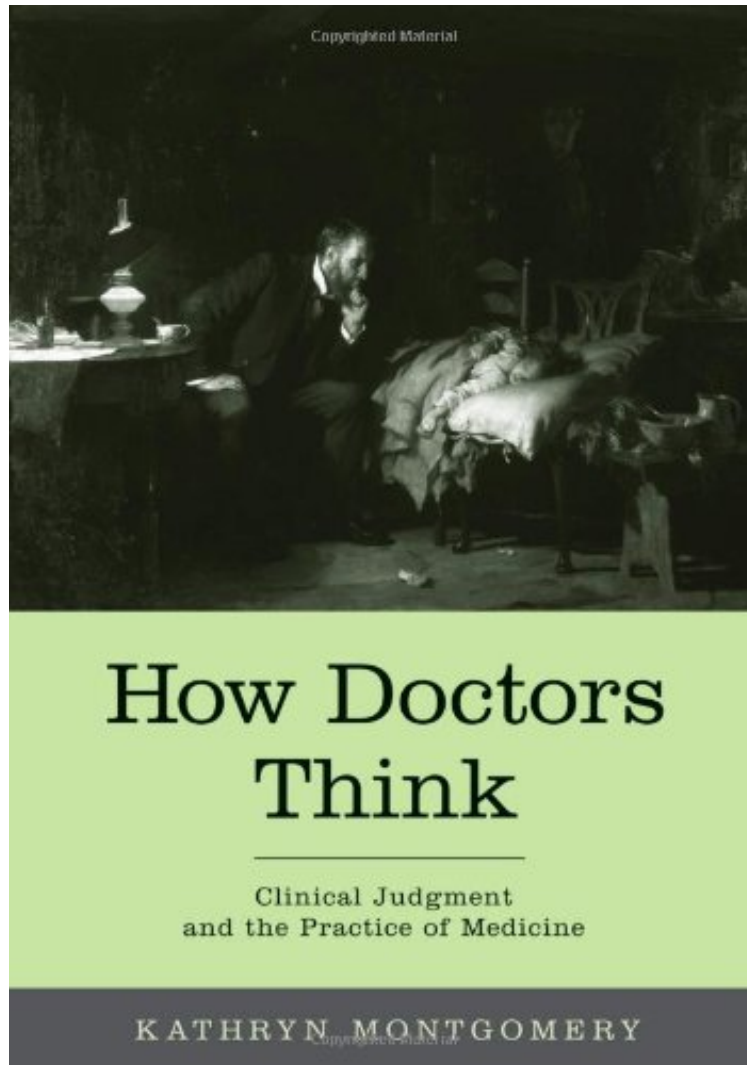


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# How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment and the Practice of Medicine

*Kathryn Montgomery*

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**Kathryn Montgomery : How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment and the Practice of Medicine** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment and the Practice of Medicine:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Full of Penetrating and Practical Insight, Plus a Pleasure to ReadBy CamberThis is an interesting book. The author, Kathryn Montgomery, isn't a doctor, but rather a "Professor of Medical Humanities" (PhD in English literature). For whatever reasons, she apparently developed a strong interest in

understanding the practice of medicine at both social and individual levels ("how doctors think"), much like an ethnographer who becomes fascinated with a particular culture and strives for a deep and comprehensive understanding of it. Her interest in this area pays off, because she succeeds in discerning both the essence and nuances of medical practice, thereby penetrating far beyond the naive and harmfully misleading impressions and assumptions held by most patients, and even by many doctors themselves. Her main finding, which she repeats and elaborates throughout the book, is that while medicine necessarily makes use of science and technology, medicine is NOT itself a science (an argument against doctors wearing white coats!), but rather an applied practice with humanistic aims, usually directed toward the particular needs of one patient at a time, accounting for the unique (and thus anecdotal) narrative unfolding of each patient's history. Because of variabilities among patients and general limitations in knowledge, clinical medicine is usually conducted in the midst of profound and unavoidable uncertainty, so judgment and skill based on attentive experience is necessary in order to make good decisions, and simple generalizable rules will never suffice by themselves. In this vein, because of its pragmatic case-specific orientation, the reasoning used in medicine must be a kind of interpretive practical reasoning (Aristotle's "phronesis") which is quite different from positivistic scientific reasoning. I initially found Montgomery's writing style to be a bit verbose and her overall presentation to be too repetitive. However, as I read further, her style and approach grew on me, to the point where it became spellbinding and I was sad to see the book end. I came to realize that Montgomery's study and writing are greatly enriched by her humanities background, and that's what sets her apart. For readers expecting a more dryly straightforward presentation (eg, *How Doctors Think* by Jerome Groopman), Montgomery's intellectually expansive approach does take some getting used to, but the adjustment is well rewarded. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in understanding "how doctors think," provided they're not deterred by a fairly sophisticated treatment which is pitched at least one notch higher than the average general reader. What you learn may be quite eye opening, not to mention very practical, since we all need to work with doctors, sometimes in dire circumstances. I also recommend this book to doctors themselves, since much of what Montgomery reveals won't be obvious to many doctors, plus doctors may find it generally edifying to take some time to reflect on the fundamental nature of their profession.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Worth reading carefully  
By MGSWSThis is an incisive, and personal, analysis of how physicians think. It analyzes the foundations and processes behind physician's decision making, and their relationship to the patient. It also looks at some of the myths that add to the illusions that physicians sometimes project, both to bolster their persona as well as to hide the uncertainty that is behind many of their decisions. The writer is not a physician, which serves to give the book greater credibility, and is illustrated by her own anxiety regarding her daughter's cancer at an unusual age. As a physician, I found myself agreeing with most of her insights. Her analysis of the seating patterns and hierarchy in medical conferences is hilarious and accurate. Although she looked at a department of medicine, I think it holds true for most specialties. This book is not an easy read, and it can be fairly slow going because of the academic vocabulary and the sometimes obscure references to philosophy, science and literature. But it is worth reading. If you have been a patient, you may gain insight into your physician's decisions. If you are a physician, you may end up realizing you are not who you thought you were.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. How we should all think  
By Eric AmbergDr. Montgomery's book should be a must for anyone who recognizes that their body is not working right. Medicine involves a science but it also involves decision making and playing the hunches. *How Doctors Think* invites the reader in the manner in which decisions are arrived at and role we play in assisting physician in their decision making. We cannot be passive recipients of medical care. Dr. Montgomery tells us why.

*How Doctors Think* defines the nature and importance of clinical judgment. Although physicians make use of science, this book argues that medicine is not itself a science but rather an interpretive practice that relies on clinical reasoning. A physician looks at the patient's history along with the presenting physical signs and symptoms and juxtaposes these with clinical experience and empirical studies to construct a tentative account of the illness. *How Doctors Think* is divided into four parts. Part one introduces the concept of medicine as a practice rather than a science; part two discusses the idea of causation; part three delves into the process of forming clinical judgment; and part four considers clinical judgment within the uncertain nature of medicine itself. In *How Doctors Think*, Montgomery contends that assuming medicine is strictly a science can have adverse side effects, and suggests reducing these by recognizing the vital role of clinical judgment.

"This is a book that will be read with pleasure by anyone interested in how medicine is done and it is a book that should be required reading for all students starting their clinical training."--Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine  
"Montgomery has certainly written a piece that will stimulate people to think more deeply about medical and wider health professional practice. It is a text I will recommend to students and colleagues."--PsychCRITIQUES  
About the Author  
Kathryn Montgomery is at Northwestern University.