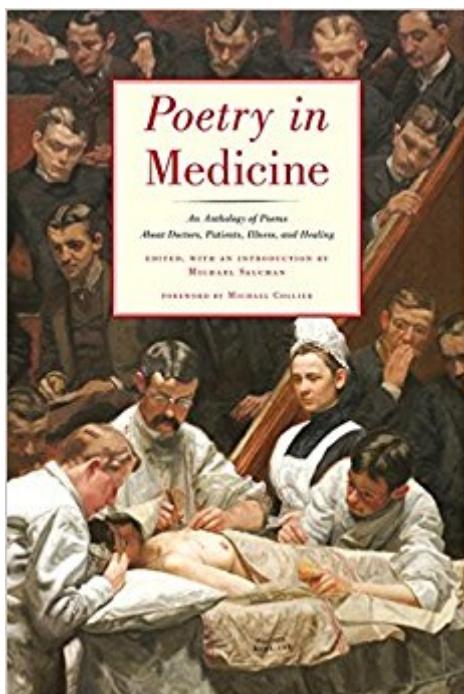


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# Poetry In Medicine: An Anthology Of Poems About Doctors, Patients, Illness And Healing



## Synopsis

Infused with hope, heartbreak, and humor, this book gathers our greatest poets from antiquity to the present, prescribing new perspectives on doctors and patients, remedies and procedures, illness and recovery. A literary elixir, Poetry in Medicine displays the genre's capacity to heal us. For millennia poets have described the ailments of the body and those who treat them. Infused with hope, heartbreak, and unexpected humor, this book gathers diverse poems about our medical experiences—poems about doctors and patients, remedies and procedures, illnesses and convalescence—each one prescribing a unique perspective and new revelations. A literary elixir, Poetry in Medicine showcases not only the breadth of poetry's relationship to medicine, but also the genre's unparalleled capacity to heal us. Contributors include Auden, Baudelaire, Berryman, Blake, Bishop, Boland, Campo, Cavafy, Clampitt, Chaucer, Clifton, Cummings, Dickinson, Donne, Conan Doyle, Eliot, Frost, Gunn, Hall, Hass, Hayden, Hirsch, Heaney, O. W. Holmes, Kooser, Larkin, Longfellow, Lowell, Merrill, Milne, Milton, Nash, Ovid, Pinsky, Plath, Rilke, Shakespeare, Seshardi, Sexton, Stevens, Szymborska, Whitman, Williams, Yeats, et al.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Who better to write about the mysteries of the body and the mind under stress than ever-vigilant, temperature-taking, empathic poets?” - Booklist

Michael Salcman is a neurosurgeon, art critic, teacher, and poet. He is the author of two collections of verse, six medical textbooks, and many articles on medicine and art. He lives in Baltimore. Michael Collier's *The Ledge* was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He teaches at the University of Maryland and is the director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.

*A Physician's Passion for Poetry* by Eileen M. Sadof  
*Poetry in Medicine*, an exquisite collection of medical poems, meticulously researched, is edited by Michael Salcman, a poet/physician. Salcman, a distinguished neurosurgeon, reveals in his introduction to the text, that his love and interest in poetry and other literary genres began when he was a young boy, confined to his bed after contracting Polio. It was at this time, as well, that he made a promise to himself to become a doctor. This collection has been a labor of love for him, to which he has dedicated a lifetime of scholarship and enjoyment. The book contains poetry written by physicians; however, most of the poems are by poets not in the medical profession. The poems represent a wide range of themes which Salcman divides into sections. Although the sections all touch on "...The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to....," as Hamlet soliloquises in Shakespeare's tragic play, works of humor and levity also appear in the book. Many of these poems will be accessible to the casual reader of poetry, while the accomplished reader of literature will find many challenges to ponder within the text. And all readers will certainly engage with issues of their own mortality, as presented through the lens of great literature. Most helpful to the reader is Salcman's Introduction, which presents a unique history of medicine as revealed in the Western Canon, from the Old Testament to modern literature. As this unique exploration of history is written in prose, it helps to clearly contextualize the poetry for the reader, especially as the poems are presented thematically. The Notes on the Poets is another fine aspect of the text. Presented at the end of the book, many details of these precise biographies uncover the literary triumphs of the writers, but also reveal the life tragedies of these gifted artists. Many faced illnesses themselves, illnesses both physical and psychological. Salcman himself has three poems included in this collection. One of these, which is quite appropriate for the mission of the text, is titled "Dr. Williams Delivers a Baby." The poem weaves all the threads of the book together. It alludes to William Carlos Williams, a well-loved family doctor and pediatrician, and an important American poet as well. Here, Dr. Williams, while on his way to deliver a baby in the home of a man of letters, possibly a scholar, stops to rest in his car, which was his habit. Salcman writes "...he'd sit in his car a notebook on his lap and arrange words- instruments on a surgical tray..." The juxtaposition of these contrasting images of poetry and medicine highlight the unusual

but strong relationship between the two callings. Then Salcman's playful gift for poetic references, has Dr. Williams run past a red wheelbarrow and some hens on his way to the birth house. This is clearly an example of one poet / physician paying homage to another poet / physician, as the red wheelbarrow and hen are the prominent images in William's famous one-line poem. Moreover, if the reader is very clever, she will soon realize that the "noisy boy," prophesied by Dr. Williams to become a writer, will be named Allen. This newborn may well be the very same Allen who later becomes the future author of "Howl"- Allen Ginsberg. What a fitting and ironic title for the famous work of a "noisy" newborn! Salcman has indicated that Williams loved doing medicine and felt that it contributed to his poetry. It is probable to conclude, that the same is true for Salcman. Two distinct, but profound passions connect in Poetry in Medicine. How often, can we say in life, that two seemingly disparate parts of any union will combine to form a perfect whole? Are poetry and medicine an unlikely pair? Hardly, as Salcman's book reveals; poetry and medicine have been "courting" for centuries.

Wonderful collection of amazing poetry perfectly compiled and edited.

great

Purchased as a gift for an poetry dabbling nursing student and she has nothing but love for it!

This poet is a master- a masterful anthology.

Just as paintings throughout the ages record evolving cultures and capture the essence of the time, so does literature and poetry use the rhythm of the word to induce sensations and illustrate emotions. Collected in this anthology of medical verse are poems from across the ages that reflect on the human condition. Its fourteen sections divide the content into parts covering remedies, procedures, types of ailments, infections, children's treatments, tumors, death, care-givers, and other aspects of illness. Many of the contributors are familiar names in literature and medicine, others enhance the content with salient sentiments. Recognizable poets include Ovid, Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, E. E. Cummings, H. W. Longfellow, Ogden Nash, Emily Dickinson, William Shakespeare, along with one of my favorites William Carlos Williams. These concise and pithy writings reveal the scope of emotions that afflict us during times of fever, fear, uncertainty, hope, dying, healing, and how we relate to one another. There is humor, irony,

sorrow, and much reflection on the world of medicine. As Anne Sexton says in her poem on Doctors, “If the doctors cure, then the sun sees it. If the doctors kill, then the earth hides it.”

So f’n wonderful. That’s the best I can offer. Read this and Angela Belli’s two wonderful volumes dealing with similar themes.

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