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LIBRARY NOTES: Book offers peek into the lives of doctors in their words

By CAROL PETROWSKI

Chances are you know who “Brangelina” is and many details of the lives of other celebrities; but what do you know about the physicians to whom you entrust your health and your very life? Probably not much, because time spent with one’s doctor is virtually all business.

Doctors try to keep to a schedule and that precludes much casual conversation in a typical office visit. So unless there’s a physician in your family or circle of friends, you really don’t know much about them.

You now have an opportunity to gain insight into lives of doctors in “White Coat Wisdom: Extraordinary Doctors Talk About What They Do, How They Got There and Why Medicine Is So Much More Than A Job,” by interviewer Stephen J. Busalacchi.

In their own words, 37 Wisconsin physicians relate true stories of defining moments in their lives. One doctor performed his own vasectomy, one works for no monetary compensation and another discovered a treatment for eyelid cancer when only 16.

They admit to mistakes they have made and they speak of relating to families of dying patients. They also recall humorous times, such as when an elderly patient looked up as the doctor was doing a pelvic exam and said, “Does your mom know what you do all day?”

This is oral history at its best. Perhaps best of all, their stories are page-turner interesting.

Physicians go to school for a long time and most have to repay a lot of money for student loans, so I don’t begrudge them high salaries, and I don’t mind reading ancient magazines while I wait to be seen. But I no longer see doctors as all-knowing and infallible. They are human and medicine is an art as well as a science.

The personal stories in “White Coat Wisdom” do not deify physicians, but they do

make readers appreciate the intense dedication to their profession that doctors consistently demonstrate.

If you know someone considering a life in medicine, I recommend “White Coat Wisdom” as essential reading. The stories are wonderful mini-memoirs and hard to put down once you start. I love the book and so do professional reviewers.

“Doctor’s lives are always interesting, especially when the reader is allowed behind the curtain. ‘White Coat Wisdom’ is a good read for anyone, but of course of special interest to the growing number involved in health and medicine,” said one reviewer.

One of the doctors represented in this outstanding book is La Crosse’s own Dr. Dennis Costakos. He is, in fact, the physician who generously donated a copy to the library. Read his story first.

My prescription is that you check out this book and read one to two chapters five times daily. Do not stop until all chapters are read.

Carol Petrowski is a La Crosse County Library System staff member at the Onalaska branch.