

Cancer Crossings: A Brother, His Doctors, and the Quest for a Cure to Childhood Leukaemia

“Time was of the essence.”

-Dr. James F. Holland

(Cancer Crossings)

Our knowledge about various diseases has been growing each day but is it at pace with the sufferings? Each disease runs faster than the ability of doctors to decipher it and find treatment, and some are just out of control even when we try everything possible. Like cancer, as per history, we discovered this disease almost two and a half centuries back, but still, it remains the second leading cause of death worldwide. We are in a time where there are many options for its treatment and care, but still, we haven't won the battle. So we can imagine the time when there weren't so many options, and doctors were struggling to save each patient's life. While the family was fighting a personal battle with this completely draining disease on all fronts, the patient was suffering every bit of it.

The struggles of a cancer patient are well known to all, but in this book – *'Cancer Crossings: a brother, his doctors and the quest for a cure to childhood leukaemia'*, the author Tim Wendel has beautifully alternated his own life after his brother was diagnosed with cancer and the medical history of finding a cure for leukaemia in children, of which they were directly or indirectly a part.

What is the Book About?

This book is a part family memoir and part medical history. Tim Wendel, who didn't have any medical knowledge or background, was awakened by a simple question by his daughter about Eric, his brother he lost to leukaemia. And he decided to dig deep to find answers to the various questions about their past. This book includes conversations with doctors working at Roswell Park in Buffalo, New York. Wendel, popularly known for his sportswriting, has woven this story of his brother's life and his battle with cancer so compassionately that it awakens empathy in the readers.

Wendel has been a pioneer in investigating and writing about underdogs and how they came together, and this story is no different. He met some great doctors like Dr James Holland, Dr Lucius Sinks, Dr Donald Pinkel, Dr Jerry Yates, and others who were the founding members of treatment for childhood leukaemia. It has not been an easy journey; each one of them did a lot of hard work and faced a lot of resistance. We might think today that finding a cure for cancer would have been as easy as any other disease, but there were many risks involved.

During one of the interviews, Dr Sinks had mentioned, *"A lot of academic people were against what we were trying to do. They really didn't understand some of the methods we were beginning to deploy against cancer."* But they never gave up! And thanks to them, the life expectancy and remission rates of children with leukaemia have increased significantly today.

The book also contains stories about their family and their sailing trips. The greatest virtue of the narration is that it shows various glimpses of memories the author has of his brother. This part of the narration adds gentleness to the book as the medical history includes a lot of intense information. This book captures a lot of history in medical terms and about his family's memories.

Why I Recommend It

I recommend this book because it differs from the other books we read about diseases and the quest for finding cures. It binds everything together, about the life Eric Wendel lived, the emotions his family went through and more importantly, the struggle of doctors that hadn't got appropriate recognition. This book is an excellent read as it highlights how the doctors never gave up on their motivation to find a cure even when the odds were against them. It's very common to be tagged as crazy and your goals unworthy when you decide to do something different. Still, it's very uncommon that you keep up your determination and achieve what you have been fighting for, and those doctors did that. This book is a testament to how far we have come and how we are still evolving in the healthcare system.

The chapters portraying the author and his family's life during that time, how they tried to enjoy every moment, adds to the hope we all need to have against this disease. The disease surely shakes a family, but it's how you decide to manage it. The Wendel family had their coping mechanism, which might not be great for others but was apt for them.

This book takes the reader on an unimaginable but real journey about the history of medicine. So it is a must-read.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the foreword of this book, this book is a compelling read for laypeople and medical professionals alike. Everything about drugs and chemotherapy explained in the book is easy for everyone to understand.

Lastly, we all complain about the lack of development and knowledge our healthcare system has, but this book reminds us how far we have come, and we need to appreciate that too.

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