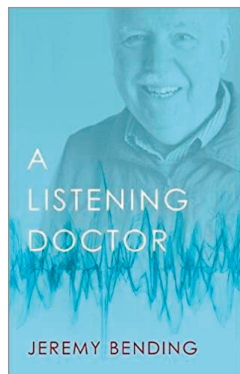


# Book review

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**Title:** A Listening Doctor

**Author:** Jeremy Bending

**Publisher:** Quartet Books Limited, 2018

**ISBN:** 978-0-70437-453-9

The author Jeremy Bending was a consultant in diabetes and endocrinology in Eastbourne for 27 years where he founded and championed the award winning Diabetes Centre. Over a total of 226 pages divided into 35 short chapters, he offers an almost chronological journey through a medical career from undergraduate to retired consultant physician – including a brush with surgery (Chapter 4). He was the only student in his year to be awarded an honours viva in surgery, but he wanted to be a physician and turned down an invitation to apply to be house surgeon to the eminent Professor Harold Ellis (a role expecting you to be on-call one in one – ie: living in, working full time without a break for the 6-month duration of the post; such were the halcyon days of training in the 1970s).

Listening is the recurring theme of each chapter, supported by anecdotes which give a range of insights into the work of a physician, the life of a physician and the interplay of the two – an especially useful feature of the book for a wannabe medic (somewhat different to the modern media portrayal) – a text recommended for the Careers library. Educationalists and students of any discipline would be well advised to read Chapters 2–5.

Medicine provided the author with an opportunity for travel: from his student elective in Ghana (Chapter 11) to working in the outposts of Newfoundland and locum consultant physician posts in this remote land which shone another light on medicine. Standing in for a diabetes and endocrinology consultant led to the author returning to the UK to train to be a specialist. The ups and downs of specialist training and the rigours of research are recounted with humour and candour – there is much to be learnt from this listening doctor who was involved in the development of insulin pump treatment when it was a pioneering technology. Chapter 18 is pertinent to this COVID-centric era when face-to-face consultations are being avoided – “Listening isn’t everything”.

In the late 1980s consultant posts were few and far between – for each UK vacancy there were about 29 senior registrar applicants. However, the consultant role elucidated by the author was a far cry from that of Sir Lancelot Spratt of Doctor in the House fame (a surgeon who bellows at his entourage to ‘listen’ and treatment is always ‘cut it out’ – see clips of 1954 film on YouTube). No leisurely lunches and afternoons on the golf course for consultant diabetologists. Jeremy describes being on the acute general medicine on-call rota for more than 25 years (once a week for 24 hours and one weekend every month, no compensatory time off, and rolling directly into the morning’s work).

This book offers a journey through the changing face of diabetes care. Jeremy was the first diabetes consultant to be appointed at Eastbourne. At the time type 2 diabetes was perceived as a ‘mild’ disease (the Diabetes Control and Complications Study and United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes

Study were works in progress). The number of people with type 2 diabetes was burgeoning and Eastbourne was an early adopter of innovative practice from group training sessions for patients, joint clinics with other specialists (Chapter 25 is based on an article in this journal in 2007 p.202), formation of multidisciplinary care teams to the setting up of a Diabetes Centre and maintaining the service (regardless of management interference).<sup>1</sup>

The writing style is very comfortable, generating a sense that Jeremy is in the room talking to you, recounting incidents from his working and personal life (particularly poignant is the birth and death of baby Oliver – Chapter 19). His observations on care delivery – as a patient lamenting the demise of the British nurse (re-modelled by the Project 2000 initiative) to the machinations of hospital management impacting the well-being of professionals and patients – will resonate with many readers.

The erudite relating of patient stories makes this a book that will help patients to better understand their diabetes (and their health professionals) and serve as a useful text for students and practitioners who work with people – listen and you will learn. An excellent read.

## Reference

1. Bending J, Kingswood C. Joint diabetes renal clinics are ‘best practice’. *Br J Diabetes Vasc Dis* 2007;7:202.



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