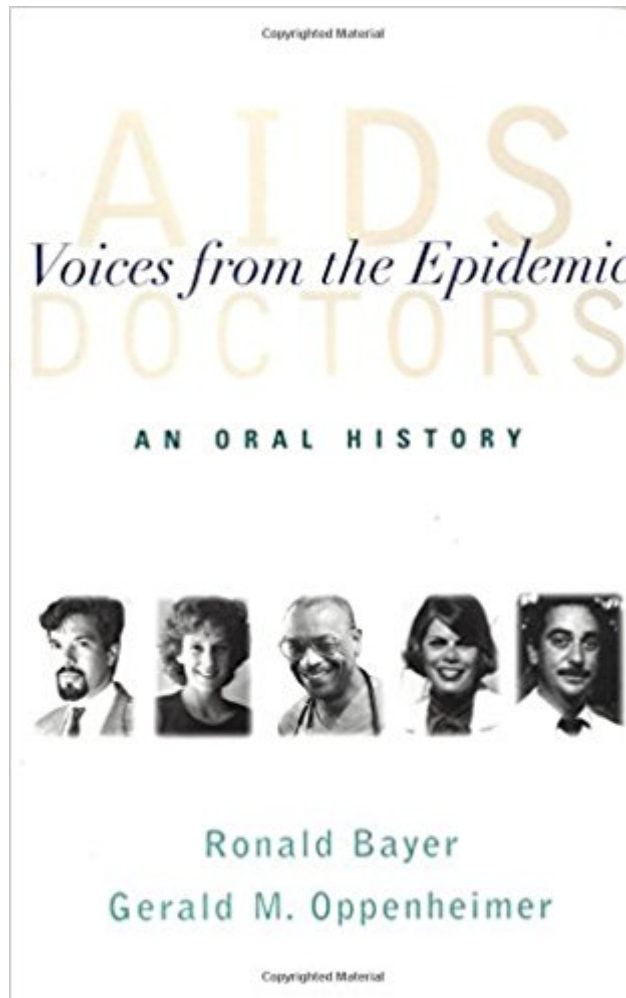




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# AIDS Doctors: Voices From The Epidemic: An Oral History



## Synopsis

Today, AIDS has been indelibly etched in our consciousness. Yet it was less than twenty years ago that doctors confronted a sudden avalanche of strange, inexplicable, seemingly untreatable conditions that signaled the arrival of a devastating new disease. Bewildered, unprepared, and pushed to the limit of their diagnostic abilities, a select group of courageous physicians nevertheless persevered. This unique collective memoir tells their story. Based on interviews with nearly eighty doctors whose lives and careers have centered on the AIDS epidemic from the early 1980s to the present, this candid, emotionally textured account details the palpable anxiety in the medical profession as it experienced a rapid succession of cases for which there was no clinical history. The physicians interviewed chronicle the roller coaster experiences of hope and despair, as they applied newly developed, often unsuccessful therapies. Yet these physicians who chose to embrace the challenge confronted more than just the sense of therapeutic helplessness in dealing with a disease they could not conquer. They also faced the tough choices inherent in treating a controversial, sexually and intravenously transmitted illness as many colleagues simply walked away. Many describe being gripped by a sense of mission: by the moral imperative to treat the disempowered and despised. Nearly all describe a common purpose, an esprit de corps that bound them together in a terrible yet exhilarating war against an invisible enemy. This extraordinary oral history forms a landmark effort in the understanding of the AIDS crisis. Carefully collected and eloquently told, the doctors' narratives reveal the tenacity and unquenchable optimism that has paved the way for taming a 20th-century plague.

## Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (May 16, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195152395

ISBN-13: 978-0195152395

Product Dimensions: 9.1 x 0.9 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.3 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #566,509 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #116 in [Books > Medical Books](#) > [Medicine](#) > [Internal Medicine](#) > [Pathology](#) > [Diseases](#) > [AIDS & HIV](#) #208 in [Books > Textbooks](#) > [Social Sciences](#) > [Gay & Lesbian Studies](#) #279 in [Books > Gay & Lesbian](#) >

## Customer Reviews

Longtime collaborators Bayer (of Columbia University's School of Public Health) and Oppenheimer (of Brooklyn College) team up again to deliver a solid, largely anecdotal account of the AIDS epidemic through the eyes of the doctors who have witnessed it. Organized into a chronological narrative, this collective oral history is based on interviews with 75 gay and straight physicians. As surveys the central medical and social issues of each era of the epidemic. From the early 1980s, when gay males with suppressed immune systems suddenly began dying of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, to the more recent years marked by treatment breakthroughs, Bayer and Oppenheimer (who together coedited *Confronting Drug Policy: Illicit Drugs in a Free Society*) showcase the physicians' words. Interviewees describe how frustrated they were initially at not being able to help their relatively young patients, and how anxious they were before they knew how the disease was transmitted, about their own safety and the safety of the gay community. As the book moves on to consider the years during which the epidemic widened to include drug users, some of the doctor-participants candidly admit that they did not feel the same degree of concern for that population. Interviewees then recall extraordinarily committed medical colleagues who tried to give patients emotional comfort as a palliative treatment and the networks they eventually created to support one another. Through the physician's experiences, Bayer and Oppenheimer trace the emergence of drug therapies and attendant controversies, as well as the treatment "partnerships" doctors eventually began creating with patients who demanded the newest drugs, whether or not they were legal or proven effective. Filled with stories, this account will be of interest to medical historians, physicians and AIDS activists. (July) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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This emotionally charged oral history looks at the collective memories of 75 doctors who have been active in the treatment of AIDS patients since the earliest years of the epidemic and illustrates how the disease has affected their lives and careers. Although Bayer (*Blood Feuds: AIDS, Blood, and the Politics of Medical Disaster*) and Oppenheimer (*Confronting Drug Policy: Illicit Drugs in a Free Society*) purposely sought out doctors with diverse backgrounds and beliefs, the recollections are often strikingly similar. The book begins with an in-depth description of the early years of confusion, frustration, fear, and rejection and then proceeds to a discussion of the coping strategies that the doctors developed as they constantly confronted death. The latter part of the book provides

opinions on clinical drug trials and the pros and cons of current treatments. A glossary of AIDS-related medical terms and brief biographies of the physicians are included. While Abraham Verghese's *My Own Country* (LJ 4/1/99) and Peter Selwyn's *Surviving the Fall* (LJ 3/1/98) offer one doctor's perspective, this book is impressive because it ranges widely over the experiences of so many physicians. Often brutally honest and always riveting, it is highly recommended for all libraries. DTina Neville, Univ. of South Florida Lib., St. Petersburg Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fascinating and well researched. Interviews with dozens of doctors struggling with this new and horrible disease. Covers each milestone in treatment and research for a cure through the eyes of physicians working in all areas. The authors draw out sincere and personal stories.

i've hardly started reading, but though the text seems wonderful, as other reviews state, the scanning conversion is dreadful--uneven type and thus hard to read. and not one would expect for an OUP publication. I'm sorry I purchased it. First time I've had a bad in-copyright kindle purchase.

A engrossing chronicle of the anguish and triumphs of doctors on the front lines of the AIDS epidemic. The story goes beyond the medicine and the science to look at the mental, emotional and personal tolls the plague took on caregivers.

A brief period of the AIDS epidemic in the USA depicted. Fortunately, now AIDS is no longer fatal in this country, it is manageable.

When the AIDS epidemic first broke out in 1981, many doctors did not participate in the research, treatment, or hope for the disease. Those that did had their lives changed forever. These were the doctors who were not afraid of accepting patients whom they were not sure they could cure. This was a new and very different disease than any of these doctors had ever come in contact with, and to try and treat it was honorable and extremely optimistic. *AIDS Doctors: Voices from the Epidemic* is a book which captures the story of AIDS since it's very (known) existence in America from the viewpoint of AIDS doctors. The authors Bayer and Oppenheimer interviewed 75 doctors, each with their own stories, for a total of 300 hours adding to research for the book. The doctors included researchers, doctors who treated AIDS patients, and directors of AIDS programs. Almost half of the doctors were gay, all of whom wanted to help their gay community find answers about why this

epidemic was predominant in their community. The goal of Bayer and Oppenheimer was to write a book portraying the effects of AIDS on doctors, and how the doctors dealt with the epidemic on the emotional side. The book was very emotional, with the doctors giving examples of interviews with patients which resulted in tears by both parties. Many of the doctors wrote about their patients' moving stories, while others wrote biographies. Even a few of the doctors interviewed were diagnosed with AIDS. Most of the doctors were still angry at the government and scientists for not taking a more proactive stance towards the disease when it was first introduced, and it showed through in their interviews. The hardest part was reading about other doctors who turned their back on these severely ill people because of their sexual orientation or lifestyle. The discrimination against the infected is revolting and a smudge among all of those in the scientific community who did not offer appropriate care. I think that this book really shows a struggle between mankind and science. Many do not understand the true emotional side of the disease and the only people who really will know are those who are affected by AIDS and their doctors. Luckily for the rest of us, these two authors definitely capture the emotion. These exceptional doctors have devoted all of their commitment to a special cause, and in turn have been affected in every way of their lives by it. This book was exceptional as it showed the emotional side of doctors who put their lives forward for a seemingly hopeless cause. The book is very hard to read, and often needs to be put aside for a few days in order to recompose yourself. This is by far one of the most remarkable books I have read on the disease and deserves to sit with the rest of the award winning medical documentaries of our time.

The emergence of AIDS, a life-threatening disease, raised health care issues. As the disease was first identified in homosexuals and drug users, physicians refused to treat these patients. A surgeon, named Milwaukee stated in the book AIDS doctors: Voices from the Epidemic, "I've got to be selfish. It's an incurable disease that's uniformly fatal, and I'm constantly at risk for getting it. I've got to think about myself. I've got to think about my family. That responsibility is greater than to the patient." Fortunately, there were a group of doctors whose interviews and stories about their experience in the AIDS epidemic we can read in the book. There were 76 doctors who were interviewed, most were women and about forty percent were homosexuals. These doctors stepped up for the people whom they understood because of their same/similar sexual orientation, because they felt compelled to help, or a great opportunity to demonstrate their care for people. The AIDS epidemic demonstrates to be difficult for the patient, their family, and the physician. Since the disease, AIDS, was identified in 1981 by the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, the struggle to overcome the

disease began. Also, the struggle to overcome discrimination from the exclusive thought that only homosexuals and drug users could get infected with AIDS began. The struggle was not left only for the person infected to fight, but the doctors who did not allowed the anxiety of not having a complete knowledge about the biology and infectivity of the disease to hold them back from helping, have now changed the situation. Now there have been many changes when one regards to AIDS. We are now more knowledgeable about the disease. After reading this book, the experiences that the doctors battled against, not knowing much about the disease and threatening their life by the possibility of being infected, we can see that without the courage of these doctors we would now not have as many advances as we have. The intensity of the desire to help AIDS patients from the doctors can be seen by their involvement they still maintain today. It is known that physician Stosh Ostrow and Jerry Cade, as of 1999, served on the President's Advisory Committee on AIDS. As the book states, although they were infected with AIDS, they still participated to not only help themselves but help others also with AIDS as they primarily wished for. When reading this book we can now appreciate the advances made. Not only has discovered medication given many people infected with AIDS more years to live, as the book states, but we can also see the more hopeful benefits towards preventing the disease. From the beginning of the epidemic, the doctors interviewed were involved in learning about the disease. This involvement has now contributed to use the information investigated about the disease to produce a vaccine for AIDS. Although this information is not given in the book, the path towards the vaccine could have started thanks to the doctors who had the courage to treat and learn about AIDS. The vaccine has been under research for about fifteen years and if we continue to have the drive that the doctors had in the book, to help AIDS patients, the vaccine for AIDS will probably be found soon.

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