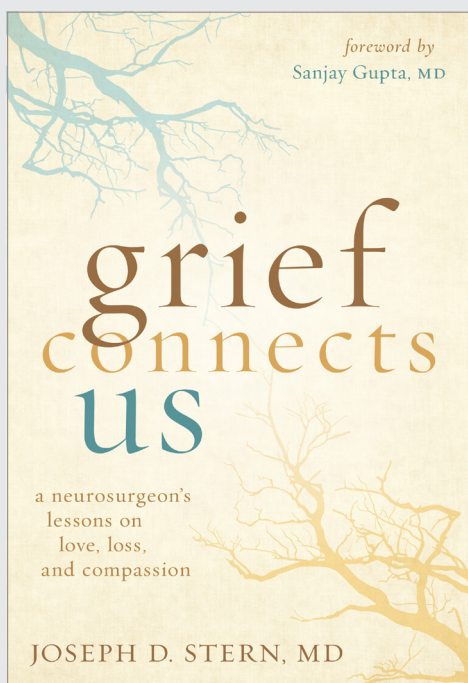


Grief Connects Us

A Neurosurgeon's Lessons on Love, Loss, and Compassion

Joseph D. Stern, MD

In this exceptionally thought-provoking and moving memoir, neurosurgeon Joseph D. Stern explores how personal loss influences the way physicians relate to patients and their families.



By Joseph D. Stern, MD

Foreword by Sanjay Gupta, MD

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Memoir/Grief and Loss/Medicine

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Praise for *Grief Connects Us*

“This is a brave tale, and the teller is broken, open, yearning, and true.”

—Margaret Edson, author of *Wit*

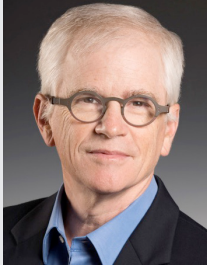
How does a doctor who deals with the death of patients on a regular basis confront his own loss when his beloved sister is living out her last days?

Despite a career as a neurosurgeon, Joseph Stern learned more about the nature of illness and death after his younger sister Victoria developed leukemia than his formal medical training ever taught him. Her death broke down the self-protective barriers he had built to perform his job and led to a profound shift in his approach to medicine.

In *Grief Connects Us*, Dr. Stern bridges the gap between patients and doctors, providing a window into the experiences and concerns they both share. No matter which side of the patient-doctor relationship you find yourself on, listening with empathy, a willingness to be vulnerable, and striving toward emotional agility are tools we can all develop to improve how we meet difficult, unavoidable challenges.

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About the Author

Joseph D. Stern, MD is a partner in the country's largest neurosurgical group practice, Carolina Neurosurgery and Spine Associates, and practices neurosurgery at the Moses H. Cone Hospital, the flagship hospital of Cone Health in Greensboro, North Carolina. Dr. Stern has published three recent essays in the *New York Times*: "Dying in the Neurosurgical I.C.U." (January 14, 2020), "Moral Distress in Neurosurgery" (August 15, 2019), and "Grief As My Guide: How My Sister Made Me a Better Doctor" (September 14, 2018). Visit Dr. Stern at JosephSternMD.com.

Q & A with Joseph Stern

How would you describe your book?

I thought I understood what patients and their families go through during my career as a neurosurgeon. I thought I appreciated the value of compassion. I never realized how little I understood about the depths of fear and suffering patients experience until my younger sister Victoria developed leukemia, had a bone marrow transplant, and died less than a year later. I share my story, along with excerpts from my sister's journal, and then give voice to the universality of these experiences with interviews of both doctors and patients. I conclude with specific, concrete recommendations for personal growth, as well as the redesign of health systems, and medical education with compassion as the primary driver of healthcare going forward.

Tell us a personal story or inspiration relating to this book.

In writing *Grief Connects Us*, I initially sought to manage my grief over my sister's death, but in the process I found I wanted to untangle my evolving feelings about death and about the impact that loss has on physicians as well as on patients. I wanted to explore how physicians integrate personal loss into their professional lives, and how these experiences influence the way they relate to patients and their families. I also wanted to better understand the choices patients make and the impact their decisions have on them and on their families.

How does your book address recovery?

The book weaves other points of view together to give the reader a rich, humane, generous, and thought-provoking narrative. I invite reflection and change, both for individuals and for the health systems we have created. This multiplicity of voices provides a unique and emotionally compelling journey for readers, inviting them to embrace vulnerability, emotional agility, and compassion.

Sales Points

- Foreword by Sanjay Gupta, MD, chief medical correspondent, CNN
- Encourages the reader, both patient and physician alike, to rethink the ways in which we discuss death and dying in the medical setting.
- Narrative-driven: Presented in large part through stories told by the author, and through his sister's journal entries, as well as through conversations with other contributing physicians and patients.
- Highlights the fact that not one of us goes untouched by illness or death, thereby making the subject matter critical for all.
- Ultimately hopeful and instructive: Urges us all to find a new path forward in the way we approach life and death, one driven by empathy, and encourages medical professionals to rethink how they make decisions for and deliver care to our patients.