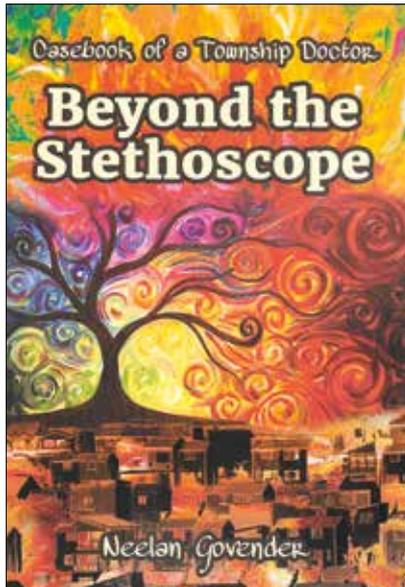


BOOK REVIEW

Beyond the Stethoscope: Casebook of a Township Doctor

By Neelan Govender. Durban, South Africa: Rebel Rabble, 2015. 308 pages. ISBN 978-0-620-45640-1



Notwithstanding its subtitle of 'Casebook', this delightful collection has nothing to do with clinical medicine per se. Rather, it is a collection of human-interest stories about individual patients and their families tended by a caring and involved general practitioner during a career spanning over 50 years. The author, Neelan Govender, fondly known as PN among his medical colleagues, is a longstanding activist in medical and liberation politics. PN is well known for his participation and leadership in various medical societies, including the South African Medical Association.

His medical practice is located in an apartheid-designated 'Indian' township, the residents of which are descendants of the indentured labourers brought in from India in 1860 and the following years to work in the sugarcane plantations of what was then the Natal Colony. Restricted to legally segregated townships, these working-class communities have retained many of the religious and cultural ways of life of the old country. This book provides a fascinating peek into the daily vicissitudes of the lives of their people – family intrigues, religious

rituals, superstition, love and marriage, the challenges of Western assimilation, and even murder. As a township GP who regularly made house calls and was routinely relied upon for counsel, PN inevitably became embroiled in numerous, often humorous but sometimes quite dramatic, life events of his patients.

The stories unfold in flowing prose, with the occasional Victorian English turn of phrase. When was the last time you packed a portmanteau? The KwaZulu-Natal reader will also be delighted by the typical Durban Indian-English vernacular from the patients' mouths, and the roundabout manner of providing a history. The reader will learn Hindi-derived words in the local vernacular: *charro* (Indian), *witou* (white man), *aka* (sister).

All in all, the book is a marvellous read and a worthy archive of the kind of community general medical practice that is fast becoming extinct.

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