

Book Case

BOOK REVIEW

Title: *Every Second Counts: The Extraordinary Race to Transplant the First Human Heart*

Author: Donald McRae

Publisher: Simon & Schuster UK

ISBN-13: 978-1471135347

Cover: Paperback

RRP: £7.48

Every Second Counts is a truly fascinating story of the race to be the first to transplant a human heart. There were three teams of surgical staff attempting to claim that coveted prize, and this book provides a background to the surgeons, their experiences and varied approaches to undertake the high-risk operation. It guides the reader from the perspectives of all three teams and describes the impact of fame on the victor, South African Dr Christiaan Barnard.

Author Donald McRae opens with an appetiser, describing the weeks preceding that momentous event, before reversing to the beginning of the journey almost a decade prior. His layout of the race to successfully transplant a human heart provides the reader with an informative yet compelling narrative, describing how the varied characters of the three main surgical protagonists affected their approach when attempting the surgery. McRae must be commended on his obviously extensive research to write an evidence-based account of the fascinating area.

A true positive of this historical account is when McRae not only focusses on the medical aspect, but the effect personalities have on the approach to surgery: from the maverick Dr Barnard, who, it seems, valued being first rather than building more extensive transplant pre-op surgical experience, to Dr Norman Shumway and Dr Adrian Kantrowitz, who were more cautious.

McRae excels in providing a balance where in addition to his description of the transplant, he does not ignore the emotional side to the urgency during the procedure. Furthermore, an important

facet of this book, is the consequence of achieving the metaphorical badge of the first surgeon to perform the operation; Dr Barnard instantly found worldwide fame which, ultimately, led to him touring the globe, and entering a different type of *theatre* through a rollercoaster personal life.

As there is a large volume of information provided about three separate surgical teams, connected only by the end goal, and occasional interaction, it could be said the narrative may be somewhat disjointed at times. However, this approach is necessary, given Dr Barnard only managed the transplant 3 days before Kantrowitz's attempt and thus the convergence on this event can only be fully appreciated by regularly visiting progress by each surgical group.

Overall, this book is not only for those readers with a medical interest, but provides an intriguing read of an historical event that describes the human impact of the race to be first to achieve a monumental feat.

Dr Andrew D Spence, Clinical Lecturer
& Consultant Gastroenterologist,
Centre for Medical Education,
Queen's University Belfast





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