

MICHELANGELO'S MEDICINE

How redefining the human body will transform health and health care

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PREFACE

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni was born on March 6, 1475. Over a career spanning the better part of a century, he came to be known as one of the greatest artists who ever lived. Among his body of work are two of the most recognizable pieces in the world— *The Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the statue of David. There were many great Renaissance artists, but Michelangelo was especially renowned for one reason: he created masterpieces.

In May 2016, I had the opportunity to take in some of this master's work during a visit to Florence, Italy, for a medical conference. I had seen many pictures of David and heard of his greatness, but I was curious to experience him in person. What surprised me most was not the anatomical detail of David but the personality and presence that radiated from the figure. Standing near him, one can feel his determination and poise. Beyond that, his sheer presence makes itself known. David is a sculpture of not just a physical body but a complete human being. This was Michelangelo's genius. He saw beyond the physical body and was able to reproduce that vision in marble.

I had already started writing a manuscript for this book prior to arriving in Florence. While there, I began to wonder, *how might Michelangelo envision and depict what we know about the human body today? What is the true masterpiece around which health and health care might revolve?* This was the inspiration for the title of this book.

Contemplating along these lines inspired me to move forward with the new model of the human being presented in this book. It also inspired me to reach further and sketch a broad and comprehensive vision of not just health but also health care and medical science. The way I saw it, I couldn't do justice to our understanding of the human being, of ourselves, without also addressing its applications; I couldn't leave the centerpiece without its limbs.

I wrote this book because the picture of health and health care that medical science paints is remarkably incomplete. That picture influences not only those within the health care system but everyone in our society. It is the knowledge we all subscribe to. That knowledge incompletely depicts a living, thinking, feeling, evolving human being—a true masterpiece— as a rigid, physical structure. As a result, too many people—patients, clinicians, and many others—are suffering unnecessarily.

The degree of incompleteness in medical science today cannot be acceptable in a modern society with the world's knowledge at its fingertips. Such incompleteness paves the way for innumerable people across the world to develop health emergencies and end up in emergency departments. What if some of the diseases we consider fatal are, in fact, curable? What if many lifelong battles against chronic diseases are avoidable? What if everyday life could be more enjoyable if we simply understood the human body more completely?

To begin converting these possibilities into realities, this book offers a way forward. That way forward includes not only healing and eliminating unnecessary suffering but also feeling the wonder we experience in the presence of a masterpiece. That masterpiece is you—the whole you.

I present this picture to you from my perspective as an emergency physician who sees life-threatening emergencies on a daily basis at work. I recognized that the stories we have been told about health, disease, and

health care are just that—stories from one perspective. In this book, we will explore other, equally important, perspectives that have been either misunderstood or ignored altogether.

Each of the three parts of this book has a distinct feel. The theme in Part I, "Redefining the Human Body and Transforming Health," is how we can reconcile the different perspectives on the human body and experience the body anew. My approach is that of reflection and direct experience: How else might we see the body? What does the body *feel* like?

I didn't feel I could legitimately present the breadth of information covered in this book without offering you substantial insight into the experiences that inform my views, so I approached the above questions by offering accounts of my own explorations of the human body. Those insights are formulated into a complete model of the human being, called The Three Bodies, which I present at the end of Part I.

The theme in Part II, "Transforming Health Care," is how we can bring the complete experience of being human into a true health care system. Translating our direct experience into a science-based, practical system is a task that requires a strong conceptual framework. Accordingly, Part II is more analytical, beginning by focusing a spotlight on the core informational problem in health care that too few are talking about. A possible solution to the problem is then explored through an analysis of the nature of energy and information and how they may contribute to a science of well-being.

The theme in Part III, "How We Get There," is action. I list concrete steps we can take to further clarify our understanding and facilitate changes in our lives, in our communities, and in health care.

I suggest reading this book not only to glean information but to experience new aspects of yourself. I invite you to pause and contemplate new perspectives as they come up, even if (especially if) they may seem counterintuitive at first glance. This is the real value of this book.

Because some of the descriptions require us to view old concepts through a different lens, I've used common phrases in new ways throughout the book, in effect creating a new lexicon with the goal of a more precise, clutter-free understanding. Whenever I do this, I underline the phrase I'm using in a new way. Especially important concepts, such as that of a "healing system," are underlined throughout the text. Underlined phrases can be referenced in the Glossary, where I clarify their intended meaning. I've also tried to anticipate and address the most common doubts a reader may have in the Q&A section at the end of many chapters. These doubts reflect the ones I myself had along the way.

Ultimately, this book is not only about a vision of health. It's also about how we experience our lives, moment to moment. It's about finding a way to place a living masterpiece at the center of your immediate experience, as well as at the center of health and health care. We have the ability and the tools to accomplish this. Let us settle for nothing less.

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