Appendix

DOCTORS AS WRITERS

“There is a writer inside every doctor, or there should be, as surgeon and writer Atul Gawande advises the medical fraternity, especially all up and coming doctors, in his book “Better”, that has become a pocket Bible of sorts for busy doctors. One must put one’s observations, ideas or thoughts, however miniscule, into words so that these could be developed for the betterment of human and medical science. But this science is also so much of an art that many doctors- practicing, teaching, or retired, have expressed in the written word not just the whys and wherefores of medical science but also perceptions and perspectives which help shape the way medicine is practiced.

Some even get paid for it, for example one of the most successful modern medical writers Abraham Verghese, author of “Cutting for Stone”, who despite having produced this work of fiction, frankly appreciates the support and time granted to him by his employers for simply writing, even entirely for commercial purposes. Many more also have become popular and successful, and highly celebrated for bringing medical science to life and who can identify with the common man and fire the imagination, good examples being Robin Cook and A J Cronin, and the veterinarian James Herriot, who brought gentle humor and bubbling laughter to medical life, albeit relating to the animal world.

Doctors are supposed to be men of science, but much like the ‘healing touch’ is the other artistic and deeply sensitive side that finds expression in writing. There are plenty of good reasons for doctors to become good writers too. First is undoubtedly the fact that they experience a wide range of human emotions as they go about their daily work of caring for people in pain and suffering. They learn so much from their patients- not only about what disease it is that ails them, but also their reaction to it and how they cope with it, and at the same time or even later, how their families and friends cope with emotional strain, financial stress and sometimes the indelible pain of loss. There are moments of great joy too- a quick or miraculous recovery, a birth in the family, or even celebrating a birthday or festival in the hospital ward- strangers turning into friends, service providers being thanked and hugged just for being there, and the joie de vivre that seems to infect everyone- sick or healthy.

And then of course, doctors write by habit- all the reading that they do also involves a great deal of technical writing for self study, examinations, presentations, teaching and patient education.”
Appendix

Some write because that is really what they ought to have done in the first place instead of taking up medicine as a career! Some even switch careers to writing while others are able to balance both medicine as a career and writing as a pastime, doing ample justice to both.

Last but not the least, they write as a hobby, and in fact, are encouraged to take it up as a useful hobby, to document and preserve for posterity their unique experiences.

So it is greatly illuminating to take a look at some of the dazzling stars of the literary world who are both practicing or erstwhile doctors, and the treasures that they have added to human experience.

This Doctor Can Write…And How!

The Ladies First

Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman ever to gain a professional degree in medicine, which she did in America in 1849. She was a trailblazer of sorts in the sense that her motivation to study medicine was not only stimulated by the illness of a close friend, a common motive even now for many medical aspirants, but also for demystifying the myth of the ‘female physician’ being relegated only to the task of carrying out an abortion, as was the norm in those times. Her sister worked and saved to put her through medical school and another one of her sisters later became the third woman in America to qualify as a doctor. She wrote widely on diseases prevalent at the time and also about the morals and virtues that she believed women should profess, whilst acknowledging, and among the first to do so, that women have equal if not stronger sexual drives and desires, but at the same time entirely capable, as are men, to control these urges and live a morally exemplary life.

Florence Nightingale, the ‘Lady with the Lamp’ founded the vocation of modern day nursing in the middle of the nineteenth century. She served in the Crimean War and was known for her habit of making daily rounds at night, alone and unaccompanied by anyone to help her, to tend to wounded soldiers, and herein the moniker she is better known by. Besides being a qualified nurse she was also an expert statistician as well as a feminist and social reformer, for all of which she gained prominence not only in her own country England but also the rest of the world, and is fondly remembered even today. She was also a gifted writer and wrote and published extensively on medicine, statistics (and the use of graphs for presenting statistical data), religion, mysticism and social reform. She did not marry in spite of having a wide circle of friends, both male and female, as she was in a way married to her profession of nursing with an almost religious fervor.

Numerous institutions, schools of nursing as well as hospitals have been named in her memory and for extraordinary contributions to the social aspects of medicine- books, poems, plays, films and television series, and several items of merchandise carry her name, so deep and wide was the impact of her work. Her most popular literary work is ‘Cassandra’ named eponymously after the Greek princess. It related her staunch belief that women should take an active part in social service and not waste their education or use it to get a suitable match and settle into lazy domesticity thereafter, and her pessimism that this would never materialize, with the protagonist giving up in the end.

Tess Gerritsen, born in 1953 and hailing from a Chinese American background succumbed to family pressure and pursued a medical degree from the University of California, San Francisco, from where she qualified in 1979. Always inclined towards writing and inspired by Nancy Drew novels in her young life, she finally got her break during her maternity leave from her work as a physician on the island of
Hawaii, USA, where she sent in a short story entry for fiction in a state magazine. Thereafter there was no looking back and she chased her first love with an obsession and went on to produce romantic thrillers for Harlequin and Harper as well as solo medical thriller novels, the first being ‘Harvest’ in 1996. She followed this up with several other significant pieces of work and published her first crime thriller ‘The Surgeon’ in 2001, which inspired the highly popular television series ‘Rizzoli and Isles’. Married to a doctor, she is also an avid gardener and amateur musician.

Kavery Nambisan is as unique a doctor and writer as one could possibly be. Born in a Karnataka village to a politician father and after having obtained her undergraduate medical education in Bangalore, India, she went on to specialize in surgery at the University of Liverpool, England, where she obtained her FRCS. She however returned to her rural roots and started practicing in the hinterland of India and eventually settled down with her family in Lonavala, in Maharashtra, India.

She has been a champion of rural health and is actively involved in a variety of charitable ventures to provide free medical and health care services to the rural and migrant poor apart from her salaried job with Tata Coffee Hospital. She has especially been instrumental in starting immunization and family planning services for rural folk together with her work as a surgeon. She has a number of literary works, albeit fiction, to her credit and is chiefly known for her children’s books as well as colorful stories about rural Indian life that are popular with older readers as well. She is also very vocal about the need for shifting focus to and strengthening rural health care and primary medical services, as against the distinctly urbanized tilt of modern health care services in India.

Taslima Nasreen, born in 1962 is a Bangladeshi writer, physician and fiery activist. She obtained her graduate medical qualification in Bangladesh in the year 1984 and thereafter worked extensively in the area of women’s health and family planning. Her interactions with girls and women who were brutalized by the political upheavals in the country, and terribly anguish when they gave birth to female offspring, made her a vociferous champion of women’s rights, which naturally did not go down well with the conservative traditions of the country.

Following release in the year 1993 of her novel ‘Lajja’ in Bengali, which described the heart-rending saga of religious persecution as it affects women, she was banned in Bangladesh and faced threats to her life. She subsequently went into exile and gave up her career as a doctor, continuing her fight against the oppression of women in her country from the safe haven of the West.

Danielle Ofri, American doctor and writer, graduated from the New York University School of Medicine and also obtained a doctorate in pharmacology from the same institution. Following this, she completed her specialty residency training in Internal Medicine at Bellevue Hospital, the oldest and one of the busiest public hospitals in America. Shortly after her specialization, she penned her experiences as a collection of essays which ultimately became her first book ‘Singular Intimacies: Becoming a Doctor at Bellevue’, published in 2001. She has since then written several more books, each dealing with a specific area of medical practice and spanning the issues of medical education, the emotional aspects of patient care and the peculiarities that immigrants face while seeking health care in America, namely ‘Incidental Findings: Lessons from my patients in the Art of Medicine’, ‘What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine’ and ‘Medicine in Translation: Journeys with My Patients’ respectively.
The Modern Wonders

Robin Cook, the well known and much loved American doctor turned writer, was born Robert Brian Cook in 1940. He graduated from Wesleyan University and educated and trained in medicine at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons and later at Harvard Medical School, going on to working and teaching at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. He was also drafted into the US Navy from 1969 to 1971, during which time he wrote his first novel ‘The Year of the Intern’.

He has propounded on a diversity of subjects related to medicine and health care, such as genetic engineering and artificial reproduction, funding for research and managed health care, organ donation and transplantation, and medical malpractice and tourism. His books are extremely informative, just as he had wanted them to be and appeal to the common man, besides being thrilling and riveting, and he is therefore known as the finest exponent of the medical thriller style of writing. A good many of his books were made into blockbuster movies that the current generation- both medical and others- has grown up on, and include names which roll off the tongue easily- ‘Coma’, ‘Sphinx’, ‘Mortal Fear’, ‘Outbreak’, ‘Terminal’, ‘Harmful Intent’, ‘Prom Queen’, ‘Foreign Body’, ‘Fever’, ‘Mindbend’, ‘Godplayer’, ‘Fatal Cure’, ‘Brain’, ‘Acceptable Risk’ and ‘Invasion’.

Atul Gawande was born in 1965 of Indian parents, both of them doctors who migrated to and settled in the USA. He finished his graduation in 1987 from Stanford University, after which he went to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and obtained a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1989. He later qualified as a surgeon from Harvard Medical School in 1995, and also earned the degree of Master in Public Health in 1999 from the Harvard School of Public Health.

After his undergraduate studies and before becoming a surgeon he was active in various presidential campaigns in the USA and was involved in helping the government draft various public health policies. Even as he was training in surgery and later endocrine surgery as a resident doctor, he keenly observed and commented on the different types of health care practices in the different states of the country, typically the fact that one model was purely driven by profit and catering to the select rich of the population and the other providing medical care of a high quality to almost all of the citizenry.

His articles were published in leading newspapers and academic journals, notably the ‘New Yorker’ and the ‘New England Journal of Medicine’. His bold stance on health care issues and the wide appeal that his writing enjoyed among the public made him popular in both public policy and philanthropic circles, with generous donations coming in later, all of which he donated to the hospital where he works now- the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in the town of Boston in Massachusetts, USA.

His three books published in quick succession have become bestsellers and are greatly enjoyed by both medical professionals and the lay public. ‘Complications’, his first book published in 2002, was straight from the heart and described the trials and tribulations of a conscientious surgeon in training. In 2007, his second book ‘Better’ carefully provided tips and suggestions to resident as well as qualified doctors to enhance and optimize their training, and in his third book ‘The Checklist Manifesto’, published in 2009, he has not minced his words while advising doctors to follow an objective checklist for major and minor surgical procedures and not just rely on an automatic and practiced ritual which might leave things to chance.

Abraham Verghese is an American doctor turned author of Indian origin born in 1955 in Ethiopia of teacher parents. Though he began to train as a doctor in Ethiopia, his studies were disrupted due to political and civil unrest, at which time his parents migrated to America. Here, he actually worked as a
hospital orderly for almost a year and then moved to India to finish his basic medical qualification from Madras Medical College in 1979. He then pursued his speciality residency training in Internal Medicine, followed by a fellowship and a staff position. He was deeply involved in working with patients suffering from HIV and AIDS at the time of the early epidemics of this disease in America. Seeking a break from the demands of his work, he moved base to pursue and earn a degree as Master of Fine Arts in 1991. He later returned to his medical practice while being a prolific writer at the same time. He now holds the post of Professor for the Theory and Practice of Medicine at the Stanford University Medical School. He is famed for his writing as well as his skills and expertise in bedside diagnosis, and the teaching of medical undergraduates and resident doctors. His important works include his first two non-fiction books ‘My Own Country’ and ‘The Tennis Partner’, and the novel he is more celebrated for- ‘Cutting for Stone’- a bestseller till today and also adapted for film recently.

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan; his father was a diplomat in the government and his mother a language teacher. After an early childhood spent in Afghanistan, Iran and France, he migrated with his family to America in 1980, the year that Afghanistan was besieged by the Soviet Union.

After his undergraduate studies in California, where the family resided, he was admitted into the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, emerging with his graduate medical degree in 1993, and later completed his residency in Internal Medicine in Los Angeles in 1996. He then went into medical practice while indulging in his passion for writing, especially about his home country Afghanistan, which held both the nostalgia of the past and the sorrow of seeing it all fall to pieces.

His first novel ‘The Kite Runner’ was published in 2003 and became an instant hit, being made into a movie in 2007. In this movie the author also made an appearance in a cameo role. In the same year he published his second novel ‘A Thousand Splendid Suns’, which while becoming hugely popular, did not match the blockbuster status of his first novel. He went on to release his third novel ‘And the Mountains Echoed’ in 2013. All three works reflect the deep longing he still nurtures for his motherland and the love for his family of many generations.

Siddhartha Mukherjee, American writer born in 1970 of Indian parentage, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his acclaimed book ‘The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer’, published in 2010. He was also hailed in his home country India and awarded the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in the country.

He graduated from Harvard Medical School and further trained in an Internal Medicine residency and an oncology fellowship at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Thus a hemato-oncologist by specialization, he has described how the normal stem cells in the body are transformed into cancer cells as a result of the onslaught of various inherited as well as environmental factors, and he is also instrumental in the search for therapies that would address this link.

Few people know Deepak Chopra as a physician but almost everyone across the world knows him as the New Age Guru! He was born in India in 1947, the year that the country gained independence from British domination. Trained in allopathic medicine and an alumnus of India’s premier institution the All India Institute of Medical Sciences or AIIMS, having graduated from there in 1969 and even serving a short stint as a rural doctor, he migrated to America in 1970. At that time, a large number of doctors were conscripted into the Vietnam War, and though Chopra could hardly afford the cost of medical education in America, he was taken in as a student and thereafter completed not only a residency in Internal Medicine and a license to practice, but also continued in higher training and completed his specialization in endocrinology.
Appendix

The trigger for his choice of a specialty subject was his curiosity about the biological and hormonal influences of the body on its different processes, in particular the cerebral and emotional aspects. Also, a meeting with a leading Ayurveda exponent of that time, and his own aversion to what he felt was an excessive and often unnecessary use of medications in allopathic practice, led him towards the philosophy and practice of transcendental meditation, which went on to give him an almost God-like persona. He was bold and almost outrageous in his condemnation of doctors prescribing too many drugs, and his friendship with the King of Pop, the late Michael Jackson, and the circumstances leading to his death, made him come down heavily upon such doctors - actually calling them ‘legalized drug pushers’!

He practices what is known as ‘integrative medicine’ and has his own private practice in America. His other celebrity friends and patients include Oprah Winfrey and the late Elizabeth Taylor. His passion for writing is phenomenal, with his current total tally of seventy five books of which almost a third are bestsellers, and his rather ignoble beginning as a writer when he was accused of plagiarizing someone else’s work, did not deter him from the resounding success he has earned with his approach to medicine, his flair for writing and his spectacular status as a lifestyle management guru.

Devdutt Pattanaik, a friend and batch mate of this author, graduated in 1994 from Grant Medical College, Mumbai, India, where he was already rousing and regaling the rest of his class with his knowledge and grasp of Indian mythology. A self made authority on the subject, he nevertheless obtained a formal degree in mythology from the University of Mumbai, and was invited to expound on his favorite subject at the first TED conference in India held in 2009. He has also taken up leadership roles in the Indian pharmaceutical and business sectors where he worked as Chief Belief Officer for more than a decade. He is also a prolific artist and himself illustrates all his writings on Hindu mythology, on which he is considered an expert like others in this genre, and he also hosts exhibitions of his paintings and sketches in major cities across the nation. His oratory skills have seen him in various television shows and serials, as well as a guest lecturer in many institutions in India and abroad.

Vincent Lam, born in 1974 is a Canadian doctor and writer of Chinese ethnicity. He earned his graduate medical degree from the University of Toronto in 1999. He is involved in emergency medical services at a Toronto hospital and also in various types of air rescue missions and ship expeditions to the poles. Among his other works, his collection of short stories- ‘Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures’ - published in 2006, is based on his days as a medical student and resident, and has been adapted to a popular Canadian television series.

Joel Fuhrman, an American general practitioner and champion of correct dietary practices, was born in 1953 and earned his graduate medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. His other talent, perhaps less known, is his proficiency in figure skating, in which he reached world status in 1976!

He is a firm believer in the benefits of micronutrients, in other words vitamins and trace minerals, in promoting and preserving good health and also capable of reversing various chronic lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and obesity, and he is currently involved in both practice and medical nutritional research. His books ‘Eat to Live’, ‘Super Immunity’ and ‘The End of Diabetes’ all became bestsellers in three consecutive years, that is 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively. He has also released several DVDs on health, nutrition and fitness apart from being showcased in various popular documentaries.

Steven Hacker is a skin specialist whose talents are not just skin deep. An American physician and innovator, he qualified as a doctor from the University of Florida in 1989 and as a specialist in Internal Medicine from the University of Michigan in 1991. He returned to his alma mater the University of
Florida to earn his degree in Dermatology in 1994, after which he first started his general skin practice and eventually shifted focus to cosmetic dermatology.

Not content with practice alone, he sought ways to bring skin care to the doorstep of the health consumer, and started his own company SkinStore.com in 1996 to enable consumers to choose from a wide array of beauty and skin care products personalized to every individual and not requiring a doctor’s consultation for its advice and use. While coping with a medical emergency that his father had while the latter was traveling abroad, he thought about the idea of facilitating medical care in such situations with the use of an electronic record of a patient’s medical history and thus founded his second company PassportMD in 2005, which is now available through the American health insurance scheme Medicare.

Even though he had no formal training in business management but only his own personal struggles and experiences as he set up a practice, he used his writing skills and practical wisdom to write and publish ‘The Medical Entrepreneur: Pearls, Pitfalls and Practical Business Advice for Doctors’, in 2010. It has proved to be an all- time hit with doctors seeking to start their own business enterprise. He topped it up in 2012 with an annual meeting in Florida, called the Medical Entrepreneur Symposium, where wide participation is seen from the medical, health care and even academic sectors. The icing on the cake was the launch in 2012 of the Medical Entrepreneur App for the iPhone and iPad- a feature offered free of cost to medics looking to set up their own practice.

Brandon Colby, an American physician, entrepreneur and writer, graduated in Genetics from the University of Michigan, then earned his medical degree from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and this was followed by still another degree, this time an MBA- Master in Business Administration, from the Stanford University Graduate School of Business.

Having been born with a rare and inherited skin condition called epidermolysis bullosa he developed a keen interest in the role of genes in causing various diseases and therefore pursued the idea of genetic intervention for such diseases. He was however not very successful in his business ‘Existence Genetics’ which offered genetic testing and information for the health care industry, and was forced to declare bankruptcy after struggling for almost seven years. In his practice, he focuses chiefly on anti- ageing treatment and genetic analysis. His book ‘Outsmart Your Genes’, published in 2010, describing the concept of genetic testing and ‘predictive medicine’, became quite a hit and following this he was invited to appear on several popular television shows.

Oliver Wolf Sacks, a neurologist and psychiatrist of British- American origin, is Professor at both the New York University School of Medicine and the University of Warwick, in North America and Great Britain respectively. He published his collection of the real case studies of his patients that were afflicted with a variety of neurological disorders, in particular encephalitis lethargica or sleeping sickness, in 1973 in the bestselling book ‘Awakenings’ which was adapted for an award winning film of the same name in 1990, and had Robin Williams and Robert De Niro in leading roles. The British television series Discovery also featured this book in its first ever documentary in 1974. The contents of this book as well as his second one ‘Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain’ were featured in another popular science television series Nova.

His latest book ‘Hallucinations’ was published in 2012, and though he has been widely translated and popularized across the globe, he has been severely criticized for ‘using’ his patients in the pursuit of his writing. He has also had aspersions cast on his personal life and his decision to remain single throughout his life yet indulging in a variety of adventures from climbing mountains to experimenting with recreational drugs.
The Greats Remembered

**John Michael Crichton**, born around the outbreak of the Second World War and who died five years ago at the age of sixty six, is perhaps better known as the creator of the television series ‘*ER*’, the book which was later made into the movie ‘*Jurassic Park*’ and the film ‘*Disclosure*’, all of which topped the American charts in the year 1994!

As extraordinary as his talents is his rather interesting young life. He always saw himself as a writer and majored in literature in undergraduate school, yet he took up studies in biology and anthropology, which probably brought out the scientist in him. Almost at the same time as he started to publish his literary works, he gained entry into Harvard Medical School, from where he graduated in 1969. His experiences with what he saw in the clinical services of the hospitals where he trained left him with the conviction that the interests of the patients were less served than the aspirations of the doctors who worked there, and though he continued to undertake further studies he never really pursued the acquisition of a license for the purpose of practicing medicine, and was happy to give it all up and return to writing full time. He was one of the few people of his time to chastise people for not caring enough for their health and resorting to pills and herbal potions hoping to have a miracle cure. He enjoyed wide appeal as a writer and was also associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in this capacity. His personal life too was as colorful as his professional one- he married and divorced several times, though much of his private life was kept away from the prying eyes of the media- even his death from cancer was unknown until the last moments of his life.

**Viktor Emil Frankl** was a Jewish Austrian physician- a psychiatrist and neurologist and survivor of the Holocaust. His terrible experiences at the concentration camps and his struggle to live through it all led him to believe in the power of the human mind and spirit, based on the simple principle of trying to find a meaning for existence in all forms of life. This philosophy was the driving force of his work and his practice of ‘logotherapy’ or ‘existential therapy’.

He also gave expression to the observation that some people are so pre-occupied with their work that they would find it impossible to unwind during the weekend, and called this “*Sunday neurosis*”! His most famous book is ‘*Man’s Search for Meaning: an Introduction to Logotherapy*’, which was originally published in German in 1946 under a different title, and was rereleased in 2006 and went on to become a bestseller.

**Benjamin Spock** was likely the most adored American doctor of all time. He was a child specialist and his love for both children and mothers shone clearly through his all time bestseller book ‘*Baby and Child Care*’, published in 1946 but still considered a Bible of sorts for expectant mothers even today. Perhaps its unique quality lies in the fact that it gently dispenses health tips to pregnant women while at the same time empowering them and reminding them of the strength of their own motherly instincts. He also reminded them to value the distinctive nature of each child and his or her particular talents while recommending that they should not be overly pampered. He also became a people’s activist and campaigned for free and universal medical care and the rights of marginalized communities.

And how maverick could one really get?! He was fond of travel, but with a difference. He lived on a sailboat and sailed with his family for the better part of his life till health reasons forced him to dock, literally!

**Oliver Wendell Holmes** was an American physician and poet who had actually started to study law before he studied medicine. However, he was a poet from his earliest days and in 1830 he published
'Old Ironsides' - one of his most well known poems and based on the American military ship the USS Constitution. He earned his graduate medical degree from Harvard Medical School in 1836, after having undertaken his initial training in medicine in Paris.

He was not a very popular or busy figure in the practice of medicine, which had left him fairly contemptuous of the use of such an exhaustive cornucopia of medicines to treat human disease. He also was highly critical of the science of homeopathy, calling it 'pretentious', and thus he mainly focused his energies on medical education, social reform and of course, writing. His notable peers were the glittering literati of Boston at that time, namely Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell.

A somewhat lesser known of his talents was that of being an inventor of sorts. He developed the handheld American version of the stereoscope, or what is known in the modern era as the View Master, though he refrained from patenting and profiting from it. He also suffered a personal tragedy when his son, also of the same name, died in the Battle of Ball's Bluff, during the American Civil War, in 1861. He also lost his wife and daughter to illness but continued writing as a means to find mental and spiritual peace. His last published book was in 1891 and was called 'Over the Teacups'.

Archibald Joseph Cronin, the celebrated novelist, hailed from Scotland and was trained as a physician and later served as a medical officer in a mining village in Wales. From this experience he was inspired to produce the novel that brought him fame from all across the world-'The Citadel'. It won the National Book Award in America in 1937. This particular book was also instrumental in bringing in sweeping reforms in the British health care system, eventually leading to the establishment of the NHS or National Health Service.

Shockingly irreverent, he is known to have chosen the study of medicine over that of Christian theology, calling the former 'the lesser of the two evils'. However, he later proved his prodigious talent as a writer, carefully planning his story and then penning it down at the feverish pace of almost five thousand words a day! It was owing to his literary career, which was extremely productive and also adapted to entertainment media like films, radio and television that he had in his social circle personalities such as Audrey Hepburn, Lawrence Olivier and Charlie Chaplin.

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle - he needs no introduction at all. The world knows him as the creator of the inimitable Sherlock Holmes of 221B, Baker Street, with the loyal John Watson by his side, but it is interesting to note that he was a fully qualified physician with an advanced medical degree for those times in Britain, which he achieved during his education and training at the University of Edinburgh Medical School.

He started writing from a very early stage in his career and indulged in all genres - crime thrillers and detective novels featuring Sherlock Holmes, adventure stories with Professor Challenger as the protagonist, historical thrillers, poems, opera, memoirs, short stories and also non-fiction.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was a Russian physician of the late nineteenth century who of course is better recognized as one of the greatest writers and dramatists of all time. He was unique among doctors turned writers in the sense that he was actively pursuing both writing and medical practice all throughout his career, amply justifying it with his famous words “Medicine is my lawful wife, and literature is my mistress”.

He was a graduate of the I M Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University and qualified in the year 1884. Hailing from a modest family, he took on the role of breadwinner but ironically, he was unable to earn his livelihood from the practice of medicine because he treated his patients, many of whom were
poor, free of charge. By now of course, he was already an established writer and made enough money to meet his needs and also those of his dependent family. He also began to suffer from tuberculosis but was in denial for a long time till, collapsed from fatigue and poor health, he took a sabbatical in the invigorating landscape of the steppes in the Ukraine.

His journey to the Russian penal colony on Sakhalin Island near Japan, and his first hand experiences of dealing with prisoners and convicts there left him appalled. He started a crusade, through his writing, for the treatment of such people in a humane manner and exhorted the government to pay heed, without much success. This confusion of taking a literary work lightly for the purpose of medical reform, and vice versa considering an immensely important piece of scientific information as merely a literary enterprise, left much of his efforts unrealized.

Battling a relapse of tuberculosis and living a bohemian way of life, preferring profligacy and debauchery to commitment, he found the kind of life partner that he wanted- ‘a wife who, like the moon, won’t appear in my sky every day’! They lived apart, she a theater artist and he a humble physician, but the numerous letters that they exchanged during this long distance marriage contain literary treasures of Russian theater history. He eventually succumbed to the disease that had plagued him for so long-tuberculosis- but not before leaving a legacy rich in plays, novellas, short stories and scientific essays, notable among which are ‘The Seagull’, ‘Three Sisters’, ‘The Cherry Orchard’, ‘A Marriage Proposal’, ‘The Wood Demon’, ‘The Bear’ and ‘Ivanov’.

**William Somerset Maugham**, one of Britain’s best loved writers and also the most profitable, was born in 1874 and orphaned at the tender age of ten. Even though he qualified as a doctor and served in the ambulance corps of the Red Cross during the First World War, he published his first novel ‘*Liza of Lambeth*’ in 1897, which was such a runaway success that he gave up furthering his medical career and turned to writing as a full time occupation. Openly homosexual and having a string of relationships, his personal life was rather turbulent; even at his death there was no grave erected for him.

His magnum opus is considered to be the highly acclaimed book ‘*Of Human Bondage*’, a semi autobiographical novel based on his own life but with a fictitious character as the protagonist. He also gained fame as a writer of thinly veiled biographies of his contemporaries; ‘*The Moon and Sixpence*’ was based on the life of Paul Gauguin while ‘*Cakes and Ale*’ was based on the life of Thomas Hardy and Hugh Walpole, both of whom were portrayed in a rather uncomplimentary manner. All three books, however, became bestsellers and iconic examples of English literature.

**James Herriot**, who wrote by this pen name was the British veterinary surgeon James Alfred “Alf” Wight, born in 1916 and died in 1995. He is loved and remembered all over the world by people of all age groups for bringing animals to life and giving them an almost human character with his writing. His experiences as a practicing veterinarian in the English countryside bring a bubbling laughter, a wonderfully warm feeling and sometimes even a teardrop as he recounts them in a language so simple and free of animosity of any kind. Only animals could do that to someone maybe, and he has described every little detail of his lifelong devotion and love for domestic animals as he tended to each of their needs, with patience, perseverance, a deep sense of wonder and a good dose of humor.

He also had his share of serving the country as an Air Force pilot during the Second World War, and enjoyed the bliss of domesticity too, though dying of prostate cancer after having lived a full life. His lifelong place of residence, Thirsk, in Yorkshire, has a museum dedicated to him and contains various implements of his life and work. His books were made into a long running television series in the UK and called ‘*All Creatures Great and Small*’. Some of these book titles are ‘*If Only They Could Talk*’, ‘*Let Sleeping Vets Lie*’, ‘*Every Living Thing*’, ‘*Vets Might Fly*’ and ‘*The Lord God Made Them All*’. 


Morgan Scott Peck was an American psychiatrist whose first book ‘The Road Less Travelled’, published in 1978 and for which he gained a worldwide reputation, is based on his work with patients-both adults and children, and the study of their personalities and characters. He stressed on the virtues of discipline, responsibility for one’s action, commitment to one’s family and dedication to simple living and high thinking.

Michael Stephen Palmer was an American doctor and prolific writer whose forte was the medical thriller. His book ‘Extreme Measures’, published in 1991 and made into a film of the same name in 1996, had Hugh Grant, Gene Hackman and Sarah Jessica Parker in leading roles. His role model and inspiration was Robin Cook, whom he read extensively, and this perhaps was the reason he chose to make medical thriller writing his genre. He has written many other less known books and has been translated into many languages.

William Carlos Williams was an American poet as well as pediatrician of the mid twentieth century, educated in Paris and New York and qualified as a doctor in 1906 from the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania as it was known at that time. He was occupied with his general as well as pediatric practice during the day and wrote poetry by night. His forte was imagery, that is, the use of language to describe things in a graphic manner and to bring them to life and add depth and meaning, and modernism, that is, describing things as they are in real life- with all the new changes that have come into American life as result of the mix and match of different cultures- in a crisp style shorn of the archaic nature of old English or European traditions. Though he was popular in America, his fame as a world renowned writer came shortly after his death in 1963 when he was honored with the Pulitzer Prize for ‘Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems’.