



The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives

By Theresa Brown

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In a book as eye-opening as it is riveting, practicing nurse and *New York Times* columnist Theresa Brown invites us to experience not just a day in the life of a nurse but all the life that happens in just one day on a hospital's cancer ward. In the span of twelve hours, lives can be lost, life-altering medical treatment decisions made, and dreams fulfilled or irrevocably stolen. In Brown's skilled hands--as both a dedicated nurse and an insightful chronicler of events--we are given an unprecedented view into the individual struggles as well as the larger truths about medicine in this country, and by shift's end, we have witnessed something profound about hope and healing and humanity.

Every day, Theresa Brown holds patients' lives in her hands. On this day there are four. There is Mr. Hampton, a patient with lymphoma to whom Brown is charged with administering a powerful drug that could cure him--or kill him; Sheila, who may have been dangerously misdiagnosed; Candace, a returning patient who arrives (perhaps advisedly) with her own disinfectant wipes, cleansing rituals, and demands; and Dorothy, who after six weeks in the hospital may finally go home. Prioritizing and ministering to their needs takes the kind of skill, sensitivity, and, yes, humor that enable a nurse to be a patient's most ardent advocate in a medical system marked by heartbreaking dysfunction as well as miraculous success.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Shift* takes an intimate look at the practice of modern medicine from the point of view of a professional on duty at the patient's bedside. It's an engrossing human drama composed of interlocking stories of patients and their families, doctors and nurses, aides, chaplains, social workers, and others who take care of sick people in a modern-day hospital. *The Shift* is one nurse's story, but it contains elements of every nurse's experience." –*Wall Street Journal*

"Brown does an excellent job of taking us moment by moment through her day -- meeting the patients (one difficult, one frail, one possibly dying, one about to go home); the paperwork (endless); the fail-safe procedures (also endless, but clearly important); the workarounds (not always kosher, but sometimes the only way to get things done). Brown...is skillful at keeping the narrative flowing. The reader feels her affection and deep sense of responsibility for her patients, even the aggravating ones, and her frustration over not being able to give them each the attention she believes they need." –*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

"Theresa Brown's *The Shift* ... should be required reading for all incoming medical and nursing students — or anyone who is a patient or visitor in a hospital. ...her story is riveting in the exacting way she recounts the way her day unfolds." –*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

"This riveting account of a day in the life of a highly competent and compassionate but overtaxed bedside nurse provides an up-close, insider's view from the perspective of one of the worker bees of the medical world. It raises important questions about staffing, shift lengths, various protocols, and the role of touch, empathy, and record keeping in healthcare. If nothing else, *The Shift* will leave you with a better understanding of why your hospital call button doesn't always bring a nurse running as quickly as you'd wish. ...the living, breathing heart of Brown's book lies in her vivid, composite profiles of the handful of patients (disguised for privacy) who come under her watch on the day in question, and her enormous concern for them." – *Barnes & Noble Review*

"...this meticulous, absorbing shift-in-the-life account of one nurse's day on a cancer ward stands out for its honesty, clarity, and heart. Brown... juggles the fears, hopes, and realities of a 12-hour shift in a typical urban hospital with remarkable insight and unflagging care. Her memoir is a must-read..." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Anyone who wants to know what it's like to be a nurse in a hospital today should read this book. Patients, families, and non-nurse colleagues tend to see nurses as ever-present yet often in the background, quietly moving from room to room, attending to patients, and distributing medications or charting at computers. But what they don't understand about what nurses do is what Brown so deftly describes—the cognitive multitasking and constant reordering of priorities that occur in the course of one shift as Brown manages the needs of four very different patients (she was working in a stem cell transplant unit at the time); completes admissions and discharges; and communicates with families, colleagues, and administrators. I hope the general public reads this book, too. It's time for consumers to see past the traditional stereotype in which nurses are only physicians' helpers, and see instead the essential role that nurses play in ensuring quality and safety in health care." –*AJN (American Journal of Nursing) / Off the Charts*

“A wonderfully-told story of the life-and-death reality of a hospital. Theresa Brown helps us understand the dramas and the dangers, as the beautifully evocative stories of nurses and doctors, patients and family members overlap and entwine during a 12-hour shift.

—Perri Klass, MD, author of *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*

“Compelling and compassionate human drama. If you want to understand how modern medicine ticks, fasten your seat belt and spend a day in the hospital with Theresa Brown on *The Shift*.”

—Danielle Ofri, MD, PhD, author of *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine*

“Written from the perspective of an immensely talented, insightful nurse, *The Shift* is extremely moving and inspiring. Brown makes me so proud to be a nurse.” —Claire M. Fagin, PhD, RN, Dean Emerita, University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

“Theresa Brown's exacting and riveting way of telling a story evokes an empathy that is overwhelming. The ability to capture the joy when an individual survives cancer and the sorrow when they do not is a talent that Theresa has perfected. A truly memorable read.” —Bobbie Berkowitz, PhD, RN, Dean and Professor, Columbia University School of Nursing

From the Back Cover

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—Perri Klass, MD, author of *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*

Practicing nurse and *New York Times* columnist Theresa Brown invites us to experience not just a day in the life of a nurse but all the life that happens in just one day on a busy teaching hospital's cancer ward. In the span of twelve hours, lives can be lost, life-altering treatment decisions made, and dreams fulfilled or irrevocably stolen. Unfolding in real time--under the watchful eyes of this dedicated professional and insightful chronicler of events--*The Shift* gives an unprecedented view into the individual struggles as well as the larger truths about medicine in this country. By shift's end, we have witnessed something profound about hope and humanity.

“Meticulous, absorbing . . . Stands out for its honesty, clarity, and heart. [Brown] juggles the fears, hopes, and realities of a twelve-hour shift in a typical urban hospital with remarkable insight and unflagging care. Her memoir is a must-read.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Riveting . . . Should be required reading for all incoming medical and nursing students--or anyone who is a patient or visitor in a hospital.” —*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“What makes Brown's story shine are the touching and sometimes bizarre moments that make real life in a hospital stranger than fiction.” —*The Boston Globe*

“An empathetic and absorbing narrative as riveting as a TV drama.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Captures perfectly [a nurse's] central role in any patient's life.” —Susan Love, MD, author of *Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book*

About the Author

Theresa Brown, RN, works as a clinical nurse. Her regular column appears on the *New York Times* opinion pages as well as on the *Times Opinionator* blog. She has also been a contributor to the popular "Well" section of that paper and writes for CNN.com and other national media. Brown received her BSN from the University of Pittsburgh and, during what she calls her past life, a PhD in English from the University of Chicago. Before becoming a nurse she taught English at Tufts University. Today, her focus is medical oncology and end-of-life issues. She lectures nationally, is a board member of the Center for Health Media and Policy at the Bellevue School of Nursing at Hunter College. Brown was a panelist for the TEDMED's Great Challenges of Health and Medicine initiative and is also involved in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's "Flip the Clinic" initiative and an advisory board member for *Scrubs Magazine*. She lives with her husband and three children in Pennsylvania.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lisa Langlais:

The book *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. So just why must we leave the best thing like a book *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives*? A number of you have a different opinion about guide. But one aim which book can give many data for us. It is absolutely right. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or details that you take for that, you could give for each other; you may share all of these. Book *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and massive function for you. You can appear the enormous world by open up and read a book. So it is very wonderful.

Clarence Bowen:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important along with you? Or just adding material when you need something to explain what you problem? How about your spare time? Or are you busy individual? If you don't have spare time to do others business, it is make one feel bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? Every individual has many questions above. The doctor has to answer that question mainly because just their can do this. It said that about book. Book is familiar on every person. Yes, it is proper. Because start from on kindergarten until university need this particular *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* to read.

Patrick Taylor:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book especially book entitled *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* your head will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a guide then become one contact form conclusion and explanation which maybe you never get before. The *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* giving you yet another experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful facts for your better life in this era. So now let us explain to you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind are going to be

pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

Brandon Macdonald:

That publication can make you to feel relax. This particular book *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* was multi-colored and of course has pictures around. As we know that book *The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives* has many kinds or type. Start from kids until young adults. For example *Naruto* or *Investigator Conan* you can read and believe you are the character on there. Therefore not at all of book usually are make you bored, any it offers up you feel happy, fun and rest. Try to choose the best book for yourself and try to like reading that.

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