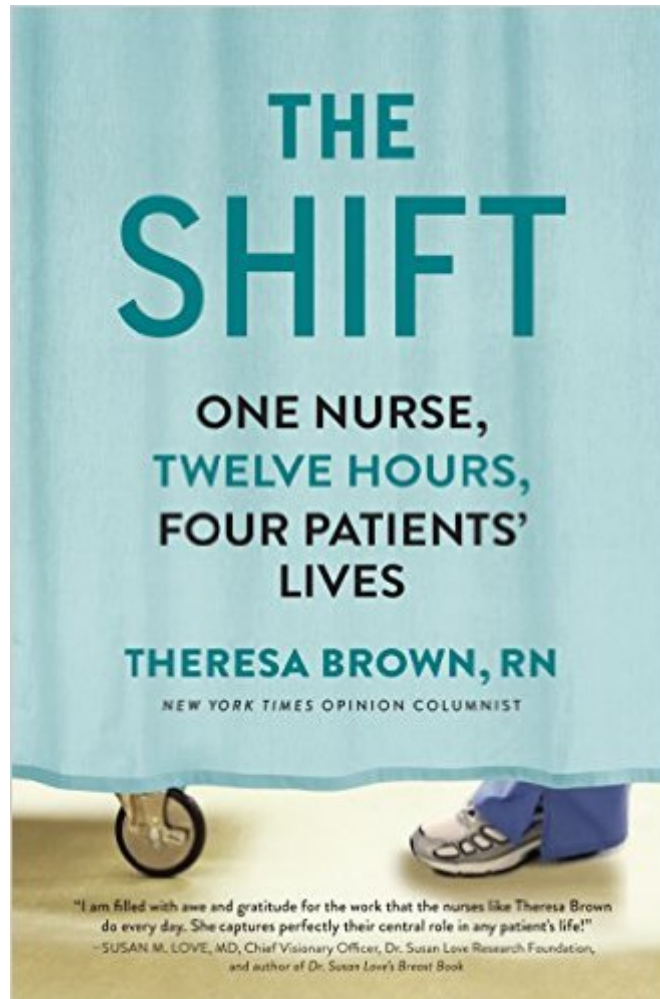


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The Shift: One Nurse, Twelve Hours, Four Patients' Lives



Synopsis

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. Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Twelve hours may seem like a lifetime, especially if you are an oncology nurse. In "The Shift," forty-five year old Theresa Brown leaves her Pittsburgh home, where her husband and kids are still

asleep, and rides her bike to the hospital on a cold November morning. She arrives at her destination, changes into her scrubs, confers with colleagues, and begins tending to her patients. Her fervent hope is that the extremely sick people on her ward will eventually go home cancer-free. Brown has a PhD in English and taught at Tufts University before she made the change to nursing. Why would anyone give up the tranquility of academia for such a demanding job, especially in today's climate of managed care, cost-cutting, and intrusive bureaucracy? Brown admits that she is overworked, frequently exhausted, and sometimes unappreciated. She needs roller skates to carry out such duties as checking vital signs, making sure that IVs are working properly, talking to concerned relatives, administering pain medication, changing dressings, and helping prep patients for medical procedures. Tragically, in spite of the best efforts of health care practitioners, things can go terribly wrong. Gradually, we begin to understand why Brown loves what she does. She has the temperament to deal with the drama and intensity of critical care nursing. Furthermore, she senses when a soothing voice, gentle touch, and kind word can help someone feel less frightened. Whether she is comforting a young firefighter whose cancer was in remission but has returned; mollifying a cantankerous patient; trying to relieve the excruciating pain of a woman whose condition is more serious than her doctors initially suspected; or readying someone for discharge, Brown knows that what she does for a living matters greatly. "The Shift" is a sensitively written, realistic, and poignant account of a day in the life of a dedicated and compassionate nurse. Theresa Brown intelligently and eloquently conveys the challenge of being "in the eternal present of illness and unease, never knowing the future."

If you are a nurse you will appreciate Ms. Brown's book. A realistic look at a 12 hour nursing shift, hers in an oncology ward, but with a few simple changes could be on any ward. Truthful in its reality (no bathroom break I noticed....not unusual where I work!) a 30 min lunch break in 12 hours? Ha! Maybe every other day! I not only loved her honest approach to telling it like it is within the world of nursing, (all those damned interruptions when you are trying to give out meds!) but she's not afraid to show her compassionate side too, following up on transferred or discharged patients. If you want to be a nurse, are a nurse, or just want to see how a nurse's day REALLY looks like, then I highly recommend this read. If you already belong to the sisterhood, reading this book will let you will rest assured knowing someone else has crazy work days too. If you've never walked a mile in nursing shoes, this book will let you try on a pair for size to see if nursing is a good fit. Ms. Brown surely proves that technology, brains and compassion DO belong together, and she has them all.

I relived my life as an RN on oncology. I loved my life as nurse and enjoyed the depth of understanding of caring as a nurse- the rewards and the costs. I never worked a straight 12 hour shift. The exhaustion must be tremendous. I worked the eight hour shifts and know the depth of physical and emotional exhaustion. Our patients returned and we were their hospital family. Some I will never forget. I can only hope I gave them what they needed.

Having had stem cell transplant for multiple myeloma, I have a personal appreciation for the efforts that both nurses and patients go through to treat the disease. This book brought much more insight into the difficult workload that both doctors and nurses have. Yet , they keep an upbeat demeanor and a supportive hand and touch. Thanks for sharing your personal story.

"The Shift" by Theresa Brown, RN, is a very good read for medical personnel and lay people alike. I'm in IT and enjoyed it a great deal. I shared it with my wife who works at a hospital. She would see right through a flimsy or dishonest account. She, too, found it compelling and pronounced it a very accurate depiction of a workday and the constant struggle to keep up, stay up and provide quality care. As Brown indelibly puts it, steeling herself to face another day:"Amid the many uncertainties of the shift there is one thing I know for sure. Am I ready and up to the job? Yes. Today, and every day, for the sake of my patients I have no other option; the answer has to be, and always is, Yes."What makes Brown's account stand out: she's got serious writing chops. Not just "she can write," but she was an English professor at Tufts before a career change put her into nursing. So, beyond being just a good writer, she understands the art and craft of writing and storytelling well enough that she was employed by a prestigious university to explain it to others. The quote above is at the beginning of Brown's day. She takes you through one long day's shift. So, her book is bracketed by day's end. Brown sums up her day as follows:"I will do this all again tomorrow and then there will be another shift and another and another. To be in the eternal present of illness and unease, never knowing the future. It's where my patients live so I, ever hopeful, live there with them."

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