

A Review of

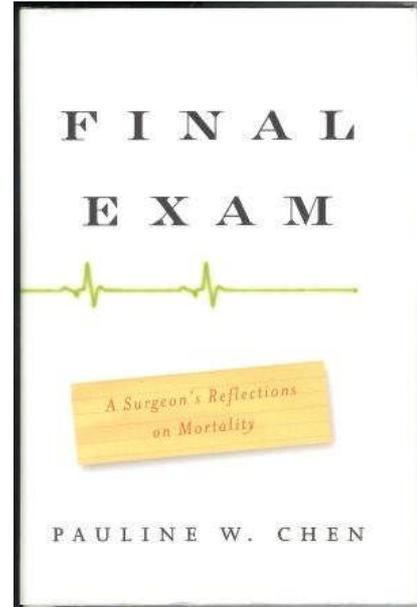
Final Exam

A Surgeon's Reflections on Mortality

Author: Pauline W. Chen

Reviewed by Jim Gleason, heart recipient

Intrigued by an amazing article by a Dr. Chen in the Virginia Quarterly Review titled: **Dead Enough?: The Paradox of Brain Death** (search the web using "Chen brain death" to see the article) I couldn't resist ordering her newly published book, **Final Exam**. In a most interesting and eloquent writing style, this liver transplant surgeon shares her own experiences through medical training and later as a practicing surgeon with death and dying, and in the telling also takes on issues in medical education and end-of-life care. From her opening description of first dissecting a cadaver to her first death pronouncement, Dr. Chen expertly intertwines personal experience with clinical expertise, and in the process clearly demonstrates that she is equally expert in being both surgeon and author.



The underlying theme of this work is how the medical community and she herself deal with death and our own mortality. She openly criticizes the lack of training doctors receive on how to support patients and families in the face of death while at the same time acknowledging that things are changing for the better in that regard, just not fast enough.

As Chen treats her patients, she comes face to face with her own mortality, even to the point of recognizing strong similarities to herself in the corpse she has to dissect as part of her training. She rejects being taught to suppress her feelings for patients, coming truly to see herself as both physician and human being, and in that insight, returns full circle in questioning how we should live life in the now.

The stories of each patient experience and the lessons learned from them make for fascinating and entertaining reading, but beyond that entertainment is the depth of life's lessons learned. I highly recommend **Final Exam** as reading for any medical professional, especially doctors, who deal death in their practice. With that said, I also feel that the average patient, especially those of us who have experienced a life saving organ transplant, will enjoy seeing the transplant experience through the eyes of the surgeon, especially one as gifted as Pauline Chen who has the writing skill to communicate deep inner feelings in carrying out her practice.

Note: **Final Exam** is available from Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com

Brief bio:

Jim Gleason, receiving his own heart transplant Oct. '94, retired after 37 years with Unisys Corporation in 2005, is a volunteer with NKF and UNOS as well as a nationally recognized speaker and author. His own book, **A Gift from the Heart**, is offered free in thanks to his donor family and can be obtained by contacting him at GLEASONJIM@AOL.COM.

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