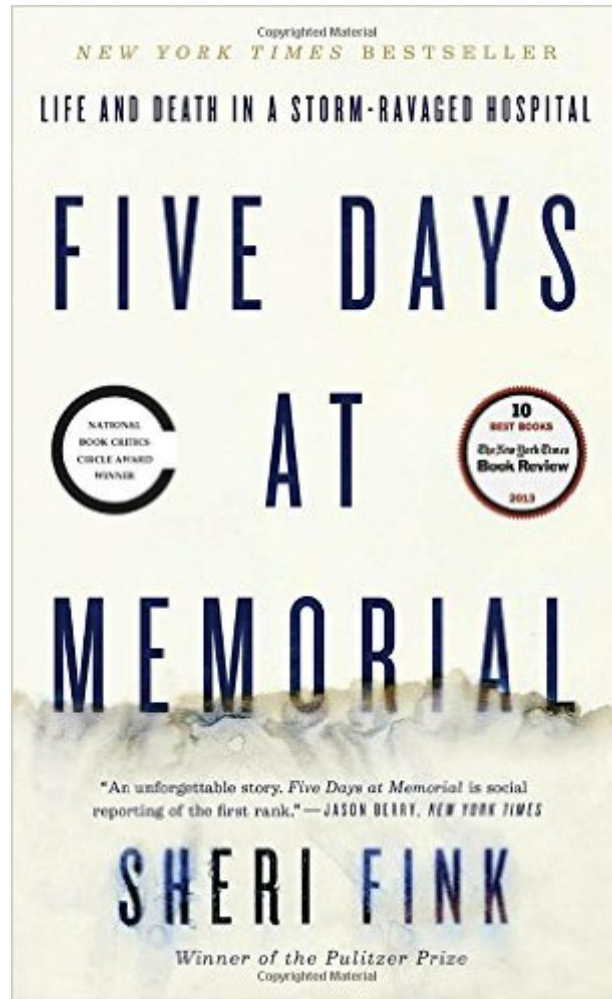


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Five Days At Memorial: Life And Death In A Storm-Ravaged Hospital



Synopsis

One of the New York Times's Best Ten Books of the Year Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction Winner of the 2014 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, the PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Ridenhour Book Prize, the 2014 American Medical Writers Association Medical Book Award (Public/Healthcare Consumers), a 2014 Science in Society Journalism Award, and the SIBA 2014 Book Award for Nonfiction An ALA Notable Book, finalist for the NYPL 2014 Helen Bernstein Award, shortlisted for the PEN/E.O. Wilson Award and the ALA Andrew Carnegie Medal An NPR "Great Reads" Book, a Chicago Tribune Best Book, a Seattle Times Best Book, a Time Magazine Best Book, Entertainment Weekly's #1 Nonfiction Book, a Christian Science Monitor Best Book, and a Kansas City Star Best Book Pulitzer Prize winner Sheri Fink's landmark investigation of patient deaths at a New Orleans hospital ravaged by Hurricane Katrina and her suspenseful portrayal of the quest for truth and justice. In the tradition of the best investigative journalism, physician and reporter Sheri Fink reconstructs 5 days at Memorial Medical Center and draws the reader into the lives of those who struggled mightily to survive and maintain life amid chaos. After Katrina struck and the floodwaters rose, the power failed, and the heat climbed, exhausted caregivers chose to designate certain patients last for rescue. Months later, several of those caregivers faced criminal allegations that they deliberately injected numerous patients with drugs to hasten their deaths. Five Days at Memorial, the culmination of six years of reporting, unspools the mystery of what happened in those days, bringing the reader into a hospital fighting for its life and into a conversation about the most terrifying form of health care rationing. In a voice at once involving and fair, masterful and intimate, Fink exposes the hidden dilemmas of end-of-life care and reveals just how ill-prepared we are for the impact of large-scale disasters and how we can do better. A remarkable book, engrossing from start to finish, Five Days at Memorial radically transforms your understanding of human nature in crisis.

Book Information

Paperback: 592 pages

Publisher: Broadway Books; Reprint edition (January 26, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307718972

ISBN-13: 978-0307718976

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.2 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (973 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #4,637 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Disaster Relief #2 inÂ Books > Medical Books > Administration & Medicine Economics > Hospital Administration #3 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Atmospheric Sciences

Customer Reviews

The first half of this book reads like an apocalyptic thriller while the second half is like a legal drama and in fact was dramatized on the television show, Boston Legal. The tragedy that occurred at Memorial Hospital in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is unflinchingly detailed by the author. The horrors that the staff and patients had to face will haunt you. The actions that were taken to save lives was heroic. There were also decisions made, however, that led to at least 7 deaths. Were these unavoidable casualties of the disaster or were these people murdered to effect a long overdue rescue of the remaining patients and staff? The questions surrounding the deaths led to an investigation of one doctor and a couple of nurses. This legal investigation is what comprises the second half of the book. The author, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, gives a fair and complete assessment of the five day ordeal in the storm ravaged hospital. There is also background information for many of the staff and some patients who were stranded in the flood. There were points that actually had me near tears as I read of their struggles. The investigation after the incident and the legal battles which ensued are equally as compelling. The political machine that took over so much of the Katrina recovery is a big part of the story. The reader is left to come to his own conclusion based on the information given. Through the stellar reporting of this author, it is easy to empathize with both sides in some respects. Was euthanasia necessary? I'm not going to go into my own personal beliefs but I will say that you will look at the whole situation differently after reading this book. You will also be forced to take a look at the choices available to us as the end of life approaches.

This is not the type of book that anyone should pick up if they are not prepared to deal with some extremely grim realities. Although certainly all of us have heard, and some of us have experienced personally, the horrors resulting from "natural disasters", Sheri Fink's exhaustively detailed description of events at Memorial Hospital in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina is uniquely powerful. This is a book that SHOULD make one angry as well as profoundly and deeply distressed. It is also a fascinating investigation of the evolution of human perspective as "technical medicine"

has become ever more complex and infrastructure-dependent. It includes an extraordinarily focused discussion of the historical issues - the fact that this hospital was flooded previously, but the necessary upgrades to provide better protection for the backup generators as recommended was never accomplished, being the most cogent. For anyone who is not aware of the background story: As well as having a complement of "regular" patients, some in Intensive Care after such things as open heart and cancer surgery, the hospital had an organization called LifeCare that leased space on the 7th floor of the main hospital complex. Their patients were mostly elderly, and were in long-term care for extremely debilitating conditions that required extensive life support and monitoring, including dialysis, tube feeding, ongoing oxygen therapy, and so on. When the hurricane first approached, on Saturday, August 27, 2005, it seemed wise to move LifeCare patients in from a less secure, smaller facility in St. Bernard Parish, to the much larger location at Memorial.

Fink takes on a story with moral and ethical overtones- what killed 45 patients at Memorial Hospital in New Orleans in the days following Hurricane Katrina, in her incredibly fascinating *Five Days at Memorial*. Fink interviewed dozens of people who were there- doctors, nurses, aides, family members, patients, hospital administrators, rescuers, police investigators, coroners and more to tell her gripping story. Fink drops the reader right into the hospital during the hurricane and in the horrific aftermath of the storm, when the levees failed and the hospital was completely surrounded by floodwaters. The reader feels the rising panic as generators fail, toilets stop working, medicines run low, cell phones die and communication is lost with the outside world. Close to 200 people were evacuated from the hospital by helicopter and boats, but 45 patients died, most of them either terminally or gravely ill, the most of any hospital in the city. And most of them died of an overdose of morphine and Versed, allegedly by the hands of Dr. Anna Poe, a surgeon at the hospital. She and two nurses were arrested for killing those patients after a lengthy investigation. Fink methodically lays out what went on at the hospital during those days. The corporate owner of the hospital, TenetCare, had an emergency plan that lacked some key elements. After 9/11, hospitals had to beef up emergency plans. "The doctors at Memorial had drilled for disasters, but for scenarios like a Sarin gas attack, modeled that April, where multiple patients arrived at the hospital at once. Not in all his years of practice had Thiele drilled for the loss of backup power, running water, and transportation.

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