

BARTON

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Dare to Know

Medical Fiction

Fiction that features medical personnel and the practice of medicine.

A genre in which medical professionals, medical practices, medical science, and illness are depicted. Usually, the plot is set within a hospital, a clinic, a medical school, or other healthcare institution. Stories often center on medical environments and the limitations, possibilities, and dangers of medicine, and portray characters as they deal with the problems and difficulties that occur in surgery, virology, immunology, and other medical fields. Protagonists are typically physicians who apply their knowledge of medicine to resolve a crisis or situation. In medical crime novels, a doctor or nurse assumes the role of amateur detective to solve a mystery (usually one of murder) that cannot otherwise be solved by law enforcement officers. Medical thrillers can portray scenarios where epidemics threaten some or all of humanity, or medical professionals use their training for sinister motivations. Protagonists must cure a virus, mitigate a pandemic, or halt the illegal or immoral use of medical technology. Medical horror mixes the hazards of medicine with horror elements. Human test subjects could be involved in extreme medical trials, or psychotic or messianic practitioners might abuse their access to unsuspecting patients and unethically push the boundaries of science. The extension or perfection of human existence is a common theme. Some plots bring into question the ethics and philosophy of medicine. The details that eventually resolve the crisis involve medical research on the author's part, or specific medical knowledge. The depiction of characters, conflict, and experiences relevant to the field of medicine are important to the story, which imparts a sense of realism to the reader. Samuel Warren's *Affecting Scenes; Being Passages from the Diary of a Physician* (1831), George McDonald's *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1878), Sarah Ome Jewett's *Country Doctor* (1884), Arthur Conan Doyle's *Round the Red Lamp* (1910), Lewis Sinclair's *Arrowsmith* (1925), R. Austin Freeman's *Mr. Pottermark's Oversight* (1930), Max Brand's "Internes Can't Take Money" (1936), Josephine Bell's *Death on the Borough Council* (1937), A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel* (1937), Frank G. Slaughter's *That None Should Die* (1941), Horace McCoy's *Scalpel* (1960), Michael Crichton's *A Case of Need* (1968), and Richard Hooker's *MASH* (1968) are early examples.

Common Elements

Intrepid yet flawed doctors
Dedicated or burned-out nurses
Beautiful young researchers
Medical students or interns
Hospital or laboratory settings
Medical procedures
Ethical dilemmas
Moral questions
High stakes
Medical jargon

Medical malpractice
Greedy co-conspirators
Evil corporations
Viruses or disease
Medical quackery
Mad doctors and scientists
Unorthodox lab experiments
Esoteric healing
Mysticism

Benefits of Reading

Allows readers to discover the medical profession and safely experience sickness
Provides readers the role model of doctor as a noble, altruistic hero
Offers readers the cautionary tale of egoism and misplaced priorities

Inspires readers' empathy for characters who suffer
Encourages readers to consider deep and uncomfortable truths about the medical world

Modern Literary Examples

<i>Coma</i> (1977) by Robin Cook
<i>Contagion</i> (1995) by Robin Cook
<i>The Cradle Will Fall</i> (1980) by Mary Higgins Clark
<i>Cutting for Stone</i> (2009) by Abraham Verghese
<i>Darkness Visible</i> (1979) by William Golding
<i>The Demon in the Freezer</i> (2002) by Richard Preston
<i>Doing Harm</i> (2014) by Kelly Parson
<i>The Doctor Digs a Grave</i> (1998) by Robin Hathaway
<i>Emergency</i> (1981) by Virginia Barclay

<i>Emergency Nurse</i> (1980) by Patricia Rae
<i>House of God</i> (1978) by Samuel Shem
<i>An Irish Country Family</i> (2019) by Patrick Taylor
<i>Lakewood</i> (2020) by Megan Giddings
<i>Life Support</i> (1997) by Tess Gerritson
<i>Oxygen</i> (2008) by Carol Wiley Cassella
<i>Random Winds</i> (1980) by Belva Plain
<i>The Silent Treatment</i> (1995) by Michael Palmer
<i>Suffer the Flesh</i> (2002) by Monica O'Rourke
<i>Tainted</i> (2009) by Ross A. Pennie
<i>The Ward</i> (2014) by S. L. Grey