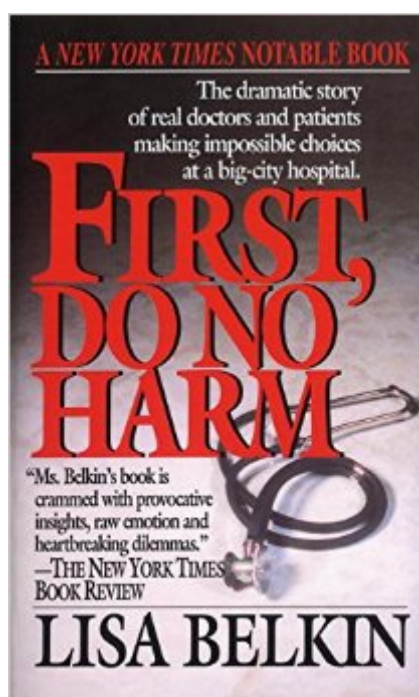


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# First, Do No Harm: The Dramatic Story Of Real Doctors And Patients Making Impossible Choices At A Big-City Hospital



## Synopsis

"A powerful, true story of life and death in a major metropolitan hospital...Harrowing... An important book."THE NEW YORK TIMES  
What is life worth? And what is a life worth living? At a time when America faces vital choices about the future of its health care, former NEW YORK TIMES correspondent Lisa Belkin takes a powerful and poignant look at the inner workings of Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas, telling the remarkable, real-life stories of the doctors, patients, families, and hospital administrators who must ask--and ultimately answer--the most profound and heart-rendng questions about life and death.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I could hardly put this book down until I was finished with it. It was not just eye-opening about how some of the ethical choices in medicine must be made, including the all-too necessary financial considerations. It showed how human doctors are and how difficult it can be for them to have to make heart-wrenching decisions in which there is no right answer, especially when it is clear that, no matter which choice they make, there is not going to be a good outcome for the patient. In spite of their training and attempt to insulate themselves emotionally from their cases in order to remain objective and professional, it's not always possible. Ms. Belkin's descriptions of doctors in tears was very moving, and proved to me that those people chose the right profession, because they really do care about their patients. I found, by searching for them on the AMA web site, that a lot of the doctors in this book are still in practice in Houston (one is in Albuquerque). This search gave

absolute credence to the fact that these stories are not fiction but about real people.

Ms. Belkin follows the work of the ethics committee at Hermann Hospital. For anyone who enjoys true medical stories and difficult biomedical ethics problems, this is a great novel. Ms. Belkin does not present solutions, since in most cases there are no "right" solutions. Instead she provides an objective account of the cases from the point of view of all parties involved. This would also be an excellent book to use for discussion in a biomedical ethics class.

Having a child featured in this book, I have read it several times. Lisa did a fantastic job when she wrote this book. You will find it to be a very insightful book. Having lived through this ordeal myself, I know that Lisa tried very hard to make sure that her facts are real and accurate. If you enjoy stories about the medical field I truly believe that you will find this one hard to put down until you have finished it.

Despite the major advances in knowledge, skills, and technology in the field of medicine, this book shows that ultimately life and death fall back on the human touch. Following the workings of an Ethics Committee in a major urban hospital over several months, Belkin clearly shows that medicine continues to be as much an art as a science and in many cases there are no "right" answers, even when decisions can affect whether a patient lives or dies. This is not a dry, mechanical review of how ethical decisions are made. Quite the opposite, the book captures your full attention from the very first page. You become fully involved in the heart-wrenching lives of actual hospital patients, as well as the no-win situations health care professionals and family members find themselves in when struggling with decisions that literally have life or death consequences. For example, when she describes the process in which the life support devices are withdrawn from a young patient you feel you are there in the room witnessing the tragedy. Some readers might scream within their minds not to do it - perhaps there is something else that can be done? Others may feel a sense of loving compassion over the ending of someone's suffering. Both types will feel incredible compassion for those who had to make the actual decision and hopefully will never have to make such a choice in their own lives.

The dilemmas in this book are extraordinarily touching. Ms. Belkin keeps your mind involved as she shifts between situations. It is hard to read the book without thinking what would you do if you were to make a decision such as those mentioned. You will enjoy reading this book especially if you are a

deep thinker. I will gladly purchase her other books.

This book will keep you wanting to turn the page and make it hard to put down the book. This is a great explanation of real life situations that patients and hospitals face everyday. Some of the situations that are hard for some people to understand why hospitals are concerned with matters like money and certain treatments of patients can be explained.

I am a big fan of medical books, with all their stories about doctors and patients. My shelves are replete with them, including books by Frank Huyler and Jerome Groopman, Jerald Winakur and Atul Gawande, just to name a few. I love stories that humanize hospitals and their staff, and make us empathize and educate us on what goes on inside those walls. This book gets an A+ in that regard. Lisa Belkin divides her book up by months, and within those months we revisit certain patients to see their progress. We come to know and care about all of them - from the tiniest of premature babies, to those with devastating injuries and illnesses that foretell the bleakest of futures. But this book is more than just our empathizing with these patients and learning about their treatments, it's also about finding out how the medical staff deals with all this on a regular basis. It's not only the patients we come to know and care about in this book. In addition, there are fascinating chapters that take us inside the ethics committees that determine the future course of action for these patients, and let us know how the doctors determine when to proceed with procedures that may or may not help, and when the very real problems of hospital finances becomes intertwined with these complicated decisions. I read this book in one sitting and it both moved me and educated me. Highly recommended.

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