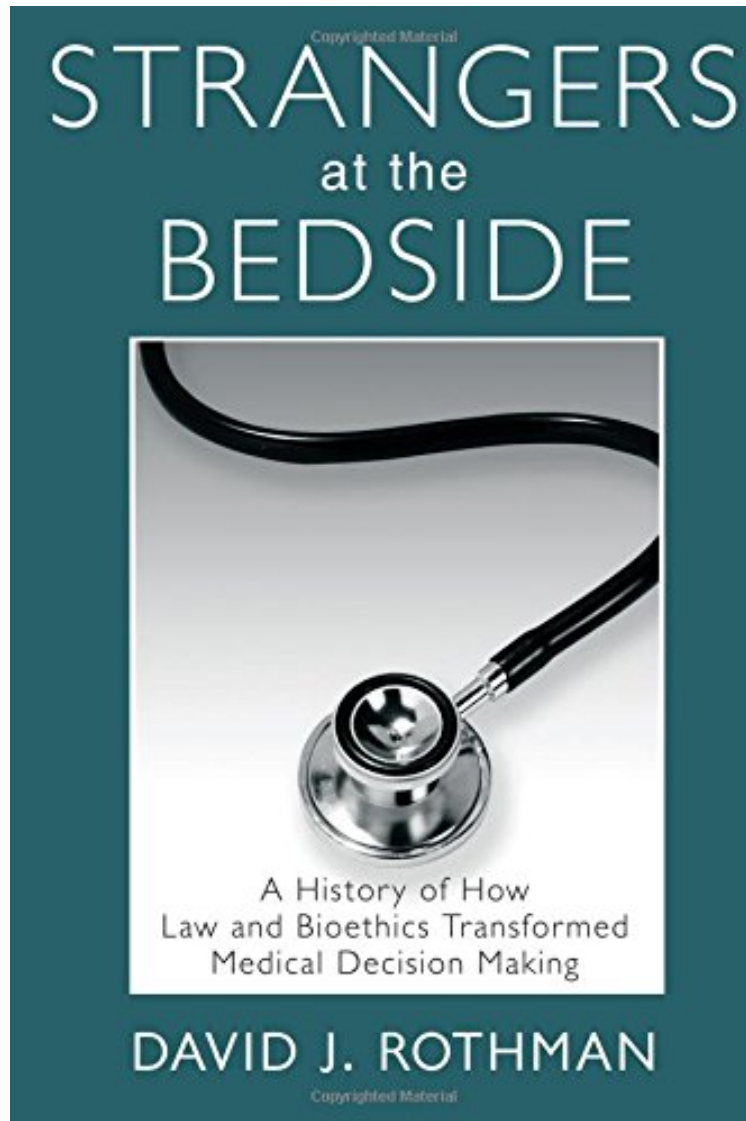


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## **Strangers at the Bedside: A History of How Law and Bioethics Transformed Medical Decision Making (Social Institutions and Social Change)**

*From David J Rothman*

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Transformed Medical Decision Making Social Institutions and Social Change | File size: 32.Mb

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By Douglas P. Johnson  
I love bioethics, and constitutional law. This book put a fresh perspective on the healthcare system that I had not considered in reference to the law. Awesome book. In the face of Affordable Care Act (2010), this is a must read.  
17 of 23 people found the following review helpful. I don't agree with everything...but well-written book!  
By K. L. Sadler  
What do you do with a book that in spite of disagree with the vantage point of the author, you have to admit that the points he raises and the stand he takes has some validity? That an author can cause the reader to stop and think about firmly held belief systems, is indicative of a good writer in my opinion.  
The author of this bioethical treatise is not a physician. He is a sociologist, and he is giving the historical background to the immense changes in how the American public views its medical establishment. In the process of becoming involved in ethics in the medical world, Rothman had to come in close contact with those he was writing about...physicians. I get the feeling that he was and to a point still in awe of the great men and the great minds he has been exposed to. Occasionally, the book seemed to be biased in favor of the physicians. A book such as this cannot be written without showing the author's own biases; author's can only admit that they harbor particular biases towards those they are writing about.  
In many issues Rothman comes down solidly on behalf of the physicians, whether or not they brought about the changes in the public's attitudes towards those who work in medicine. Rothman bemoans the fact that the public has involved lawyers, bioethicists, and politicians in what used to be the private domain of physicians. Yet he writes and explains the history behind this lowering of pedestals for doctors and medical researchers...all the while trying to explain why physicians felt their patients should rely 'on those who know and understand' (read that to mean physicians think most patients and families are too stupid to understand basic concepts).  
This book actually gives a good and vitally important background into the movements for individual rights and the exposure of unethical experimentation and medical treatment which led to the creation of new standards for medical care and research, as well as the installment of Internal Research Boards (IRBs) which are suppose to act as brakes on over-ambitious and unethical practices. Unfortunately, it is all too clear in recent media reports that even IRBs in universities and hospitals are not enough to protect the American public from research by those not interested in protecting the patients and alleviating pain, but rather shows more concern for keeping the grant money coming, fame, and doing science merely for the sake of doing science ("because we can!")  
John Hopkins obviously hasn't changed its attitudes over 30 some odd years towards the rights of the individual, since they are continuing to attract attention and controversy because of unethical research.  
This book is definitely a must-read for anyone interested in bioethics. Even if the reader does not agree with the author, the book provides a different, and somewhat valid reflection of the medical establishment's views towards the infringement of their previously existing rights in determining patient care and the moral standards of research.  
Karen Sadler, Science Education, University of Pittsburgh  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good Product  
By Tanner Brools  
This book was in very good form and the delivery was on time, if not early. I cannot attest to the quality of the material, because I purchased it for a class, but the merchant was fantastic to work with.

David Rothman gives us a brilliant, finely etched study of medical practice today. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the practice of medicine in the United States underwent a most remarkable--and thoroughly controversial--transformation. The discretion that the profession once enjoyed has been increasingly circumscribed, and now an almost bewildering number of parties and procedures participate in medical decision making. Well into the post-World War II period, decisions at the bedside were the almost exclusive concern of the individual physician, even when they raised fundamental ethical and social issues. It was mainly doctors who wrote and read about the morality of withholding a course of antibiotics and letting pneumonia serve as the old man's best friend, of considering a newborn with grave birth defects a "stillbirth" thus sparing the parents the agony of choice and the burden of care, of experimenting on the institutionalized the retarded to learn more about hepatitis, or of giving one patient and not another access to the iron lung when the machine was in short supply. Moreover, it was usually the individual physician who decided these matters without formal discussions with patients, their families, or even with colleagues, and certainly without drawing the attention of journalists, judges, or professional philosophers. The impact of the invasion of outsiders into medical decision-making, most generally framed, was to make the invisible visible. Outsiders to medicine--that is, lawyers, judges, legislators, and academics--have penetrated its every nook and cranny, in the process giving medicine exceptional prominence on the public agenda and making it the subject of popular discourse. The glare of the spotlight transformed medical decision making, shaping not merely the external conditions under which medicine would be practiced (something that the state, through the regulation of licensure, had always done), but the very substance of medical practice--the decisions that physicians made at the bedside.

From *Library Journal*  
Rothman, a bioethicist at Columbia University, traces the dramatic and profound changes that have taken medical decision-making out of the hands of physicians in the past half-century. His historical analysis,

which covers medical research and human experimentation in the United States with a focus on the post-World War II era, is interesting, well written, and highly informative. Also fascinating is his recounting of the early moves toward government and bureaucratic control of medical research. This is not a case-by-case study as many bioethics books are, but rather an informed interpretation of why there are so many ethics cases in contemporary medicine to consider. Solidly researched and well documented, this book is excellent for collections in the social and life sciences, and valuable for general collections with literate, informed patrons. - Mark L. Shelton, Athens, Ohio Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. "For anyone wishing to become acquainted with this field, I would recommend reading [Strangers at the Bedside] for a situated, historical account." Kathryn Ehrich, Medical Sociology News "Rothman has written an informative and insightful account of how American medicine has been transformed over the past twenty-five years. . . . He gives a masterful outline of academic bioethics, one of the primary sources of transformation. His discussion of certain key issues -- the availability of kidney dialysis machines, transplantation, and the wrenching decisions about sick newborns -- is particularly good. . . . [Strangers at the Bedside] is recommended to anyone seeking to understand how bioethics and the law have become so important in research and clinical medicine in American society today." Stephen E. Lammers, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History "Rothman's book is an exciting intellectual history." Charles L. Bosk, Contemporary Sociology "Rothman illuminates a major transformation in American medicine. . . . This is an important book that deserves wide readership." Ronald L. Numbers, The American Historical "The landscape of biomedical research and clinical medicine has changed dramatically in the past twenty-five years. Professor David J. Rothman. . . chronicles this change in a well-written and thoughtful book that should be read by anyone who is concerned about the evolving relationship between medical researchers and their subjects or between doctors and their patients." Greg Gramelspacher, The Journal of American History "[Rothman's] book is a fascinating effort chronicling recent changes in medical practice in the United States." Susan McIntosh, History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences "David Rothman's challenging new book is essential reading for understanding the transformation in public and professional attitudes that recast medical decision making and launched the new discipline of bioethics. . . . Although the current throng of outsiders in a patient's room may well be a transitional stage in the history of relations between doctors and patients, this work will surely enjoy a more lasting place in the historiography of twentieth-century medicine." Susan E. Lederer, Isis About the Author David J. Rothman is Bernard Schoenberg Professor of Social Medicine, professor of history, and director of the Center for the Study of Science and Medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. He is the author of numerous works, including The Willowbrook Wars, The Discovery of the Asylum, and The Pursuit of Perfection: The Promise and Perils of Medical Enhancement.