

## **My Own Country: A Doctor's Story** **Abraham Vergese**

Nestled in the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee, the town of Johnson City had always seemed exempt from the anxieties of modern American life. But when the local hospital treated its first AIDS patient, a crisis that had once seemed an “urban problem” had arrived in the town to stay.

Working in Johnson City was Abraham Vergese, a young Indian doctor specializing in infectious diseases. Dr. Vergese became by necessity the local AIDS expert, soon besieged by a shocking number of male and female patients whose stories came to occupy his mind, and even take over his life. Vergese brought a singular perspective to Johnson City: as a doctor unique in his abilities; as an outsider who could talk to people suspicious of local practitioners; above all, as a writer of grace and compassion who saw that what was happening in this conservative community was both a medical and a spiritual emergency.

Out of his experience comes a startling but ultimately uplifting portrait of the American heartland as it confronts—and surmounts—its deepest prejudices and fears.

([http://www.amazon.com/dp/0679752927/ref=cm\\_sw\\_su\\_dp](http://www.amazon.com/dp/0679752927/ref=cm_sw_su_dp))

## **Living and Dying in Brick City: Stories from the Front Lines of an Inner-City E.R.** **Sampson Davis, MD**

Sampson Davis is best known as one of three friends from inner-city Newark who made a pact in high school to become doctors. Their book *The Pact* and their work through the Three Doctors Foundation have inspired countless young men and women to strive for goals they otherwise would not have dreamed they could attain. In this book, Dr. Davis looks at the healthcare crisis in the inner city from a rare perspective: as a doctor who works on the front line of emergency medical care in the community

where he grew up, and as a member of that community who has faced the same challenges as the people he treats every day. He also offers invaluable practical advice for those living in such communities, where conditions like asthma, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and AIDS are disproportionately endemic.

Dr. Davis's sister, a drug addict, died of AIDS; his brother is now paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair as a result of a bar fight; and he himself did time in juvenile detention—a wake-up call that changed his life. He recounts recognizing a young man who is brought to the E.R. with critical gunshot wounds as someone who was arrested with him when he was a teenager during a robbery gone bad; describes a patient whose case of sickle-cell anemia rouses an ethical dilemma; and explains the difficulty he has convincing his landlord and friend, an older woman, to go to the hospital for much-needed treatment. With empathy and hard-earned wisdom, *Living and Dying in Brick City* presents an urgent picture of medical care in our cities. It is an important resource guide for anyone at risk, anyone close to those at risk, and anyone who cares about the fate of our cities.

([http://www.amazon.com/dp/0812982347/ref=cm\\_sw\\_su\\_dp](http://www.amazon.com/dp/0812982347/ref=cm_sw_su_dp))

## **Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America**

**Laurie Kaye**

*Mama Might Be Better Off Dead* is an unsettling, profound look at the human face of health care. Both disturbing and illuminating, it immerses readers in the lives of four generations of a poor, African-American family beset with the devastating illnesses that are all too common in America's inner-cities.

The story takes place in North Lawndale, a neighborhood that lies in the shadows of Chicago's Loop. Although surrounded by some of the city's finest medical facilities, North Lawndale is one of the sickest, most medically underserved communities in the country. Headed by Jackie Banes, who oversees the care of a diabetic grandmother, a husband on kidney dialysis, an ailing father, and three children, the Banes family

contends with countless medical crises. From visits to emergency rooms and dialysis units, to trials with home care, to struggles for Medicaid eligibility, Abraham chronicles their access (or lack of access) to medical care.

Told sympathetically but without sentimentality, their story reveals an inadequate health care system that is further undermined by the direct and indirect effects of poverty. When people are poor, they become sick easily. When people are sick, their families quickly become poorer.

Embedded in the family narrative is a lucid analysis of the gaps, inconsistencies, and inequalities the poor face when they seek health care. This book reveals what health care policies crafted in Washington, D. C. or state capitals look like when they hit the street. It shows how Medicaid and Medicare work and don't work, the Catch-22s of hospital financing in the inner city, the racial politics of organ transplants, the failure of childhood immunization programs, the vexed issues of individual responsibility and institutional paternalism. One observer puts it this way: "Show me the poor woman who finds a way to get everything she's entitled to in the system, and I'll show you a woman who could run General Motors."

Abraham deftly weaves these themes together to make a persuasive case for health care reform while unflinchingly presenting the complexities that will make true reform as difficult as it is necessary. *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead* is a book with the power to change the way health care is understood in America. For those seeking to learn what our current system of health care promises and what it delivers, it offers a place for the debate to begin.

([http://www.amazon.com/dp/0226001393/ref=cm\\_sw\\_su\\_dp](http://www.amazon.com/dp/0226001393/ref=cm_sw_su_dp))