

Making Rounds with Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat

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Main content

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Making Rounds with Oscar: The Extraordinary Gift of an Ordinary Cat by David Dosa

New York, NY: Hyperion, 2010. Paperback, 256 pp., \$13.99.

Reviewed by James Marroquin, MD

In a 2007 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, amid the usual fare of the latest and greatest in biomedical research, there appeared a short piece about a cat named Oscar (1). Living as a pet in a nursing home dementia unit, Oscar demonstrated an uncanny ability to predict which of its residents were about to die. The furry creature's presence at a person's bedside invariably signaled that life's end was near. The story generated a good deal of interest, earning the feline 15 minutes of fame. Now, years later, a book entitled *Making Rounds with Oscar* chronicles a doctor's discovery of the animal's special gift.

The author, David Dosa, is a geriatrician at the Steere House Nursing Center in Rhode Island where Oscar lives. He begins the book by explaining why he made the unusual choice to specialize in care for the elderly. I call his career decision unusual because gerontology remains among the least popular fields of practice for medical students to enter. Geriatric fellowship training programs at even the most prestigious institutions are sometimes unable to find willing candidates. Why is this the case at a time when our aging population needs more practitioners equipped to care for its elderly members? In a fee-for-service system that pays physicians for performing procedures and seeing a high volume of patients, the time-intensive nature of geriatric medicine makes it a specialty with some of the lowest reimbursement for the greatest amount of work. And while many young people enter medicine hoping to someday be the celebrated bearers of miracle cures, geriatric care focuses on helping individuals adapt to the inevitable frailties and limitations that come with age.

But Dosa does not lament or even mention what he has foregone in money, power, and prestige. The fulfillment he derives from his vocation among the elderly does not seem to leave much room for feelings of martyrdom or envy. It is a fulfillment, he says, that comes from bearing witness to the stories of his patients as they live the last of their days. These stories form the heart of the book, and Oscar's tale serves as an ideal vehicle for sharing them.

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Dosa, a physician and geriatrician, discovers a cat who has the ability to predict the impending death of terminally ill patients in the nursing center where he lives. Note: Because this project is categorized as in development, the data is only available on IMDbPro and is subject to change. Contact: [View company contact information](#). 2 While the reliability on the cat may seem strange in modern health care settings, the family of a patient that died with Oscar at the bedside reported: 'it's not that we trusted the cat more than the nurse. Not, exactly. This underscored the importance of the prediction of death and the acknowledgement of the dying process. 2 As of January 2010, Oscar the Cat accurately predicted 50 deaths. 3 Classic cases revisited: Oscar the cat and predicting death. Article. Apr 2016.