

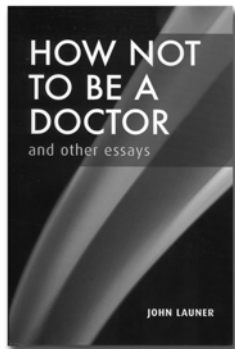
BOOK REVIEW

Through a doctor's eyes

How not to be a doctor and other essays. John Launer. Oxford: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2007 (112 pp, \$57.80). ISBN 978 1 85315 752 3.

WHAT LUCKY PEOPLE, the subscribers to *QJM*, which, like the *BMJ*, prefers its initials to its full name! (In this case, it is apt — *QJM* is no longer the *Quarterly Journal of Medicine*, but now appears monthly.) Those lucky readers, looking forward each month to a Launer column, probably include a few Australians.

This slim hardback, containing 50 of Launer's illuminating short columns, published in *QJM* this century, is not the usual collection of medical anecdotes. These are insightful comments on how patients and doctors think, how hospitals and health systems work (or do not work), and different approaches to health, illness, living, communicating and dying in different cultures. Launer's thoughtfulness is reminiscent of that of Booker Prize winner, fellow Briton John Berger (author of *A fortu-*



nate man: the story of a country doctor. London: Penguin, 1967). Launer's simple yet elegant writing sets an example for many a doctor-writer.

But I have two quibbles with the publisher. At this price, the Royal Society could have afforded an indexer. When someone writes as well as this, readers want to return to his thoughts. Without an index, who can remember what was in which of the 50 essays? And why no date of first appearance in *QJM*? “Context is everything” say the sages; and “the times” are the essence of the context.

It was a pity that the review copy arrived too late to be recommended for the Christmas stocking of every doctor you know. But if a doctor friend has a birthday soon, is a little over \$1 per essay too expensive?

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