

DOCTORS AS STARS

Many doctors would know of A J Cronin's novel *The Citadel*. Published in the 1930s, it was to become the first in a literary genre that has humanised doctors and demystified medicine. The book was quickly adapted for the big screen and was rated as one of the better films of the 1930s, picking up four Oscar nominations.

Many novels have followed its successful formula, such as Samuel Shem's *The House of God*, which depicts the life of interns, capturing the poor working conditions, lack of sleep, isolation from friends and family, and exacting emotional toll. Interestingly, the reverse perspective is explored in Michael Crichton's *Five Patients*, which examines the hospital troubles and turmoil of five patients, as seen through the empathetic eyes of a junior doctor.

Many of us will recall television's earliest forays into medical drama, with *Ben Casey* and the seminal BBC series *Dr Finlay's Casebook*, whose very human stories have since morphed into the demanding and enigmatic plots of shows such as *House*.

Indeed, the past 50 years have seen no less than 45 medical dramas produced for television audiences in the United States and Canada, such as *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, *General Hospital* and *ER*; 22 medical dramas in the United Kingdom, such as *Doctor Finlay* and *Doc Martin*; and at least 11 in Australia and New Zealand, including *A Country Practice*, *All Saints* and the documentary drama *RPA*.

These programs have proven to be both compulsive viewing and consistent rating successes, attracting a loyal following and winning many awards. In concert, they have destroyed the somewhat distant and aloof image of doctors by portraying their practitioners as very fallible human beings.

Furthermore, they have served to increase the health literacy of our community. But what is their attraction?

The poet Philip Larkin wrote that: "Life is first boredom, then fear". These medical dramas are anything but boring — and vicarious fear is eminently tolerable.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

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September MJA BookClub Winners

Congratulations to: Dr JL Sinha, Vic; and Dr Andrew Bofinger, Qld, who each win a copy of *Clinical Cases in Kidney Diseases*. Thanks to everyone who purchased books from the September MJA BookClub and went into the draw.

Pictured right is Erawaty, AMPCo's Client Service Executive, drawing the September winners. To see this month's MJA BookClub's great offers, see page 597 and the inside back cover of this issue.

