

It is our honor to welcome you to the UNC School of Medicine. As part of your orientation, we, your peers, want to engage you in a discussion of the book *Being Mortal* by Dr. Atul Gawande. As the book's subtitle indicates, this is a book about "what matters in the end": how people grow old, the social and clinical challenges we face as we age, and the difficult but worthwhile conversations caregivers strive to have with patients and their families at the end of life. It is a powerful book with insights relevant to all your courses in Foundation Phase and beyond.

Becoming a doctor means becoming a lifelong learner, gaining the capacity for self-study and to evaluate a source's utility. In reading *Being Mortal*, we encourage you to take a similar approach. Atul Gawande is a respected physician-writer, and he skillfully blends research on assisted living in the United States with insights from clinical practice and his own personal experiences caring for loved ones toward the end of their lives. Throughout, questions about medicine's role improving patients' lives through direct intervention, support of other caregivers, and the promotion of more equitable health policies loom large. While reading, please consider the following questions to guide you:

1. What is the author's argument? How does he justify it?
2. Which are Gawande's best supported proposals, and which are not? Why?
3. What are some alternative interpretations of his findings?
4. How does the structure of the book shape the argument itself? How would it change if this were a textbook? A scholarly historical monograph? A novel?
5. Ultimately, do you agree or disagree with the author's conclusions about the role of medicine at the end of life?

**Discussion of *Being Mortal* will take place in person on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 26.** You will meet in small discussion groups led by both student and faculty co-facilitators working together. Furthermore, your discussion group will become your section of the Social & Health Systems course, allowing us the opportunity to re-visit our conversations throughout the year.

We encourage you to read the whole book, but we remember well that the summer before medical school was meant for you to enjoy yourself before entering the rigorous medical school life! Therefore, discussion will focus mainly on chapters 2 through 7. Come to orientation that day prepared to talk and listen to your peers' insights. In the coming weeks, we will also be sending you a discussion guide for the chapters we will focus on.

This is, by choice, a provocative book. If you feel yourself chafing against Gawande's arguments while reading, think of it as an opportunity for reflection and counterarguments. Draw on your own experiences to adapt and challenge the book. Listening to others carefully and disagreeing respectfully are skills we seek to cultivate throughout our education as physicians.

Again, this is only the first step in a longer journey. Our discussion of medicine at the end of life will continue in many forms in the coming years. The topic is of paramount importance when discussing structural considerations in health care, especially in relation to other powerful (and intersecting) factors, such as socioeconomic status, race, occupation, education, gender, sexuality, and more. We're excited to have you here and weigh into these critical conversations. Welcome!

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