

OAFP Health Equity & Social Justice Discussion Club

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

“Canary in the Coal Mine: A Forgotten Rural Community: A Hidden Epidemic, and a Lone Doctor Battling for the Life, Health, and Soul of the People”

Author: William Cooke, MD, FAAFP | Moderator: Roxanne Cech, MD, FAAFP

Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Cooke, please tell us briefly what compelled you to write this book about your small southeast Indiana community through the lens of your personal story?
2. Your book masterfully describes the realities of inequity, disparity, and generational poverty and sets the stage for your reader to understand Austin’s opioid and HIV crisis in living color. The way you described one of your patients, “Samantha” is a snapshot of Austin’s overlapping crises. Can you elaborate on how your awareness for your patients’ needs are far deeper than what is skin deep?
 - a. To our discussion participants, which patient story of Dr. Cooke’s stood out to you and why?
3. Through the pages of your book, your belief that addicts cannot be helped until they hit rock bottom later evolved after building deeper understanding into the personal lives of your patients. Please share your personal revelation and how that changed you as a physician delivering compassionate, whole-person care.
4. Dr. Cooke, you bravely shared with your readers the struggles you encountered in your first marriage and articulated your frustrations with the limitations of primary care services that you were able to provide. If you could share how your trip to the Amazon re-centered your focus and helped to reshape the course of your life.
 - a. Have other members in our discussion group had similar experiences of personal enlightenment?
5. Advocating for change in the midst of chaos has become a signature quality for you. Having represented your community and region before the Indiana state legislature and then Governor Pence, what advice would you give other family physicians willing to act for critical health system reforms?
6. Dr. Cooke, you made mention that as a medical student, you were often told by respected professors to reconsider a career choice in primary care because you were “throwing your potential away.” Unfortunately, this phenomena is not isolated to Indiana University School of Medicine and is pervasive in many medical school environments. Considering that primary care is the ONLY medical specialty proven to lengthen the human lifespan, what would you tell medical students who want to make a difference in their communities?
7. Dr. Cooke, as a family physician, addressing other family physicians tonight, what parting words of inspiration would you like to leave them?