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978-1-009-51506-1 — An Improbable Psychiatrist  
Rebecca Lawrence  
Frontmatter  
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AN IMPROBABLE PSYCHIATRIST

‘Rebecca Lawrence’s memoir strikes at the heart of our understanding of mental illness: What is it? Why do some of us succumb to it? And how best might we treat it? Written with charm, wisdom, and empathy, we could have no better guide to unravelling such mysteries: Lawrence is the sort of person you would want as a friend as much as a psychiatrist. A poignant and powerful read.’

**Rachel Kelly, *Sunday Times* bestselling author of *Black Rainbow: How Words Healed Me – My Journey through Depression***

‘Dr Rebecca Lawrence always wanted to be a psychiatrist but became a patient first. She describes the persisting conflict between those two roles with brutal honesty: the struggles to continue with treatment, rumination about the justification for her diagnosis, and having to face the lingering stigma around mental illness in the medical profession. Most of all, she provides lucid insight into the curious process of becoming a “psychiatrist” – questioning the validity of some of our everyday professional assumptions in a way that those of us who have been patients too can so easily identify with, and those who have not would greatly benefit from reading.’

**Linda Gask, Emerita Professor of Primary Care Psychiatry, University of Manchester**

‘This is a compulsive read and a bold, important book for anyone interested in understanding more about mental ill health. Dr Lawrence poignantly illustrates her lived experience of the impact of severe mental illness in the context of her work as a psychiatrist and her family life. She also

powerfully reflects on the complexities of diagnosis, treatment, and stigma, and their intersection with the messiness of the human condition.'

**Professor Louise M. Howard OBE, Professor Emerita in  
Women's Mental Health, Section of Women's Mental  
Health, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and  
Neuroscience, King's College London**

'This isn't the first account of "my life as a doctor" – to name, for example, Alastair Santhouse in *Head First* reflecting on his family and his journey into medicine, then psychiatry, or Richard Taylor's *The Mind of a Murderer*, which describes his understanding more about the previous generations as he developed his career – or a doctor's reflection on their work – think Henry Marsh on work as a neurosurgeon or Suzanne O'Sullivan on neurology – but what stands out in Rebecca Lawrence's book is that she is writing about her own psychiatric history alongside and woven in with an account of her career as a doctor specialising in psychiatry.

This is raw material, not glossed over but told as much as anyone can with a real openness about her struggles when her life seemed almost unbearably hard – on starting work as a newly qualified doctor, with a new baby, and keeping her marriage going with a husband who could be pulled to work on the other side of the world, plus managing parental expectations and, at the same time, her developing a serious mental illness. Rebecca clearly sets out the struggle to try and fit in with the healthcare system and its demands and views on treatment, and her own wish to avoid being held in hospital under legal powers, a possibility should she refuse to comply, and if the risks seemed too high to her carers. There is also the stigma she faces from medical peers. For example, the

doctor she sees for career advice and who warns her off psychiatry as a choice, or the consultant interviewers who initially offer her a year's post, only to reduce this to 6 months when Rebecca is honest about her psychiatric history. "Would an endocrinologist do the same with a doctor who has diabetes?" she asks.

Although the subject matter isn't an easy read, there is a feeling of hope – we know at the outset that this book is written by a doctor who has a mental disorder, but also she has her family around her (see the dedication at the start – "to Richard and our daughters") and she clearly makes significant contributions as a doctor in practice. No mean feat for anyone to combine all this. And she's a splendid writer. The prose is flowing and the vivid descriptions bring her story to life.

Recommended for anyone with a mental illness themselves, or in their family, ultimately for the sense of recovery and of having a future which Rebecca brings, and for anyone working in the healthcare service, to bring to life a patient with a particular condition, into a whole person engaged in clinical work and with a family around her to care for and love.'

**Dr Rosalind Ramsay, Consultant Psychiatrist | Responsible Officer | Deputy Medical Director, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust**

'Rebecca Lawrence's *An Improbable Psychiatrist* is a compelling work that holds a unique place in the mental health literature genre. The first memoir to be written by a psychiatrist and mother with bipolar disorder, Lawrence's gut-wrenching honesty is riveting. She eloquently depicts her suffering and triumphs through the extraordinary perspective of a parent, a

patient, and a highly trained psychiatrist. Lawrence offers hope to readers that no matter how low depression takes them, they too can transform their lives into one that's worth living. *An Improbable Psychiatrist* is nothing short of a remarkable journey.'

**Dyane Harwood, author, *Birth of a New Brain – Healing from Postpartum Bipolar Disorder***

# An Improbable Psychiatrist Rebecca Lawrence



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Every effort has been made in preparing this book to provide accurate and up-to-  
date information that is in accord with accepted standards and practice at the time  
of publication. Although case histories are drawn from actual cases, every effort has  
been made to disguise the identities of the individuals involved. Nevertheless, the  
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To Richard and our daughters



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