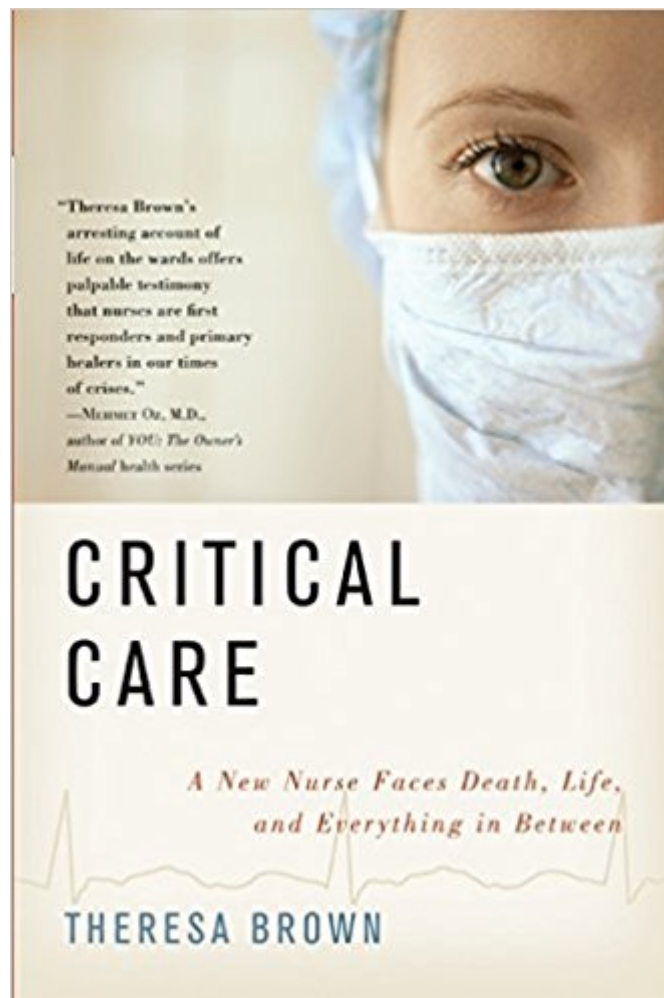




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# Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, And Everything In Between



## Synopsis

“Among all the recent books on medicine, *Critical Care* stands alone.” —Pauline Chen, author of *Final Exam*  
“A must read for anyone who wants to understand healthcare. Extraordinary.” —Elizabeth Cohen, MPH, CNN Senior Medical Correspondent  
*Critical Care* is the powerful and absorbing memoir of Theresa Brown—a regular contributor to the New York Times blog “Well” about her experiences during the first year on the job as an oncology nurse; in the process, Brown sheds brilliant light on issues of mortality and meaning in our lives.

## Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: HarperOne; 1 edition (April 26, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061791547

ISBN-13: 978-0061791543

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 110 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #22,882 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #15 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Critical Care #16 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Critical Care #66 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Medical

## Customer Reviews

“Theresa Brown’s arresting account of life on the wards offers palpable testimony that nurses are first responders and primary healers in our times of crises.” —(Mehmet Oz, MD, author of *YOU: The Owner’s Manual* health series)  
“If Theresa Brown tends her patients as well as she tells her story, they are lucky patients indeed. This absorbing dispatch from the front lines of medical care captures the daily travails and triumphs of nursing with humor, compassion, and sometimes terrifying immediacy.” —(Julie Salamon, author of *Hospital* and *The Devil’s Candy*)  
“Critical Care is a gift from an English-teacher-turned-nurse who writes from a deeply human context about her first year in a hospital oncology ward...A book of stirring stories about how we live, care for the sick and die.” —(Richard M. Cohen, author of *Blindsided* and *Strong at the Broken Places*)  
“Brown shows us what it means to be a nurse

and helps us understand that nurses need as much intensive care as their patients. Sometimes more! (Suzanne Gordon, author of *Nursing Against the Odds*) "A beautifully written account of a nurse's first year on the wards, a medical memoir that combines lyricism and compassion with searing honesty and well-timed laugh-out-loud wit...I loved this book." (Pauline Chen, author of *Final Exam*) "A must read for anyone who wants to understand healthcare. This extraordinary book will open your eyes to the reality of nursing. If you or your loved one ends up in the hospital, you'll wish you had someone like Nurse Brown at your side." (Elizabeth Cohen, MPH, CNN Senior Medical Correspondent)

"Doctors heal, or try to, but as nurses we step into the breach, figure out what needs to be done for any given patient today, on this shift, and then, with love and exasperation, do it as best as we can." from *Critical Care* "At my job, people die," writes Theresa Brown, capturing both the burden and the singular importance of her profession. Brown, a former English professor at Tufts University, chronicles here her first year as an R.N. in medical oncology. As she does so, Brown illuminates the unique role of nurses in health care, giving us a deeply moving portrait of the day-to-day work nurses do: caring for the person who is ill, not just the illness itself. *Critical Care* takes us with Brown as she struggles to tend to her patients' needs, both physical (the rigors of chemotherapy) and emotional (their late-night fears). Along the way, we see the work nurses do to fight for their patients' dignity, in spite of punishing treatments and an often uncaring hospital bureaucracy. We also see how a twelve-hour day of caring for the seriously ill gives Brown herself a deeper appreciation of what it means to be alive. Ultimately, this is a book about embracing life, whether in times of sickness or health. As she takes us into the place where patients and nurses meet, Brown shows us the power of human connection in the face of mortality. She does so with a keen sense of humor and remarkable powers of observation, making *Critical Care* a powerful contribution to the literature of medicine.

Theresa Brown's book *"Critical Care"* has been excerpted in the New York Times Health and Wellness section, which is where I first read about the book. Brown, a college-English-professor-turned-oncology-nurse, combines her two areas of expertise in a book about her first year as a nurse. She's an excellent writer with an interesting story to tell. As another reviewer here noted, nurses are the unsung heroes of the medical world. They do the grunt work, the unceasing care of patients, and are often the first, and last, contact a patient has with a hospital. Brown, because she works in the oncology department at a Pittsburgh-area hospital, has seen, and

participated in, the ups and downs of cancer treatment. What doesn't kill cancer patients often ends up saving them, or at least putting them into remission, but the effects of chemotherapy are often as bad as the disease itself. How many cancer patients ask themselves in the midst of horrifying treatment if the possible cure is worth the agonies of the treatment? Brown does not make any statements about the worthiness of treatment, she assumes her readers would be able enough to make a decision if faced with a cancer diagnosis. Brown also writes about the personal toll cancer treatment and possible death of patients have on the nursing/doctor staff. Some medical staff are able to distance themselves from the pain they see around them, while others can't. Brown writes that identifying with her patients - showing her "human side" - was a good method she chose to use when dealing with treating cancer patients. Theresa Brown's book seems to be an honest appraisal of her first year in nursing. She's a very good writer and her story, while often offering a discouraging look at cancer treatment and care, is well worth reading.

I pray no one in my immediate family ever gets hit with cancer. I am the medical case in our family. Diabetes Type 1 diagnosed in 1983. Pancreas transplant 12/1999, kidney transplant 6/2000. Three months of dialysis. Diabetic diarrhea and diabetic Gastroparesis. I felt for all the patients in the "poop" chapter. It is very humbling, humiliating and hard to deal with. Thank you for cleaning it up. I love my nurses when I'm in the hospital and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you do. I always wanted to be a nurse but knew I couldn't deal with the bodily secretions from both ends. My gag reflex is very powerful.

I always enjoy Nurse Brown's articles in the New York Times, so I purchased this book for a friend in health care... and I never ended up giving it to her, because I'd broken the spine while reading it myself. This is an engaging, beautifully written, wonderfully humane look inside a world that most of us only see as patients. I don't even like nonfiction normally, and I'm reading it for the third time.

"Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, and Everything in Between" is one of the best books for new nurses I have ever come across. I have been a nurse for almost 3 years but struggled to find a job out of college and have only been working for a little over a year. I still consider myself a "new nurse", even though I have a little bit of experience. I can't believe it took me so long to find and read this book! Theresa Brown's words are so honest and real, beautifully written, funny at times, sad at times... I found myself laughing, crying, nodding my head in agreement, remembering similar situations I've found myself in, etc. Any nurse can relate to the situations in this book! It

reminded me why I became a nurse and it made me thankful to know that there are other nurses out there who became nurses for the same reasons I did. If I was ever sick, I'd want Theresa Brown to be taking care of me! This is a must-read.

The true story of a nurse in the critical care field. I look forward to finishing this one and seeing what I like, love, and possibly don't look forward to if I enter this field of nursing. :-)

Fascinating and enlightening. I am often in hospitals visiting the ill, including the oncology floor, but I will never look at these places and the incredibly hard-working people who serve there in the same way. She is a terrific writer and clearly an incredibly healing nurse who ministers both through her empathy and her medical expertise.

LOVE LOVE LOVED this book. An amazingly written book, and you really get a sense of a nurse's perspective. I can't wait until Theresa Brown finishes her next one!

In personal but not overly dramatic prose, Brown takes the reader inside an oncology ward to meet sick and dying patients. She shows us, chapter by chapter and day by day, how she cares for them -- both medically and personally.

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