

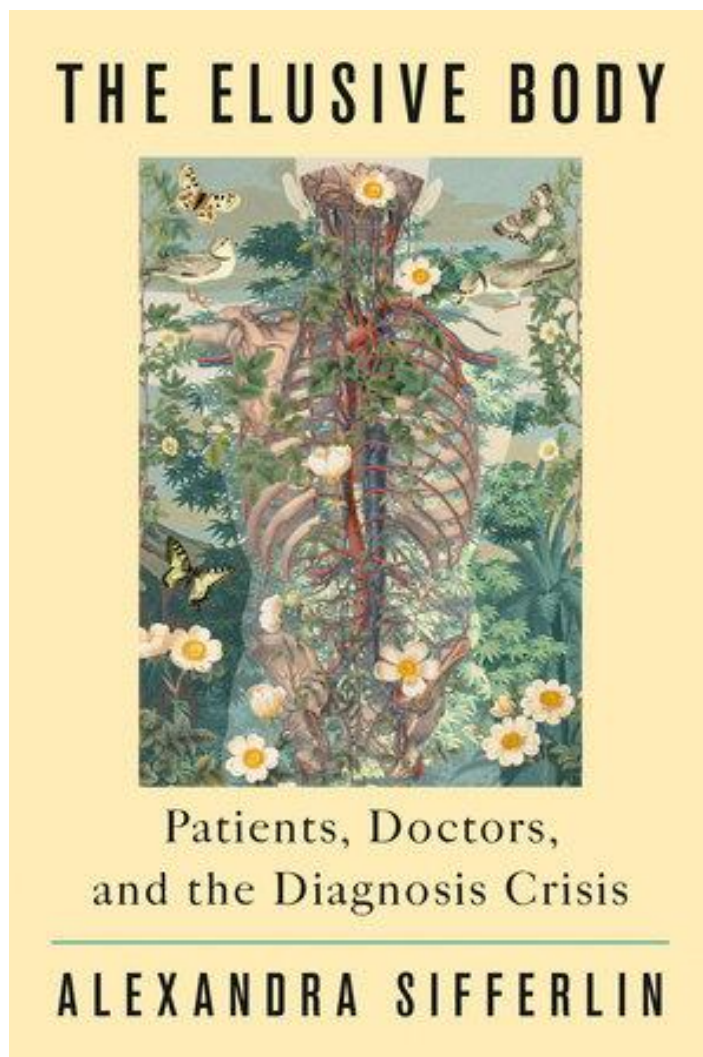
dear residents

Listening Before Diagnosing

June 28, 2026

Dear Residents,

I recently finished reading [The Elusive Body](#) by Alexandra Sifferlin. I always enjoy reading how the practice of medicine is viewed from outside the profession. The book explores diagnostic error and why, despite decades of attention, we continue to struggle to close this important gap in patient care.



It begins with the story of a patient who spent years without a diagnosis before ultimately finding answers through the NIH Undiagnosed Diseases Program. Along the way, the book examines diagnostic uncertainty, cognitive errors, and the work of Gurpreet Dhaliwal, whose clinical reasoning has inspired many physicians. It also discusses overdiagnosis, the burden of uncertainty on patients, and the emerging role of artificial intelligence in diagnosis.

One of the themes that resonated with me is that diagnostic excellence is built through experience. The more patients we see, the more we learn what fits, what does not fit, and how to approach complex diagnostic dilemmas. We learn not only how to recognize patterns, but also how to live with uncertainty when the answer is not immediately apparent.

As you know, our program is turning its attention to thoughtfully harnessing AI in ways that enhance, rather than diminish, your diagnostic skills. AI will undoubtedly become an increasingly powerful tool, but one of the great attractions of residency training remains the sheer variety of clinical presentations and the intellectual satisfaction of working through the possibilities yourself.

The lesson that emerges repeatedly in the book is hardly new, but it is worth repeating: listening carefully to the patient remains the first and most important step in diagnosis. When we truncate the history, rush the encounter, or allow technology to come between us and the patient, we increase the risk of diagnostic error. We also risk losing something equally important: the trust, therapeutic connection, and understanding that come from being fully present at the bedside.

We should embrace technology enthusiastically, but at the same time redouble our commitment to the fundamentals of medicine. The future will belong not to physicians who can out-compute machines, but to those who can combine sound clinical reasoning, human judgment, and genuine attention to the patient in front of them.

I trust that you already know this. Residency is where you learn to practice it.

Best regards,

Dino Kazi