About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Hot Lights, Cold Steel* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Hot Lights, Cold Steel*.

About the Author

Michael Collins served as Chief Resident in Orthopedic Surgery at the Mayo Clinic. Currently he is an active partner in a busy surgical practice in Chicago where he lives with his wife Patti and their twelve children. This is his first book.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout the book, Collins struggles to find a balance between being a dispassionate, effective doctor and one that cares for his patients’ emotional and physical needs. Do you think that doctors should separate these aspects of their treatment? On page 51, for example, did you agree with Dr. Collins’ decision to speak with Jeff’s father about his other son’s suicide risk?

2. How did Dr. Collins’ work affect his relationship with Patti and their children? Have you ever had a job that’s impacted your personal life? In what circumstances would you accept these interferences and in what circumstances would you change careers?
3. Dr. Collins also consistently struggles with trying not to judge the actions of his patients. On page 123, what was your reaction to Jason and his return to smoking (and what it did to his hand)? Would you have taken Dr. Wilk’s advice to heart and apologized to Jason for judging him? Later in the book, on page 177, Dr. Collins refrains from passing judgment on the drunk driver who killed the little boy. Is this a sign of Dr. Collins’ growth?

4. Another common thread in Hot Lights, Cold Steel is Collins’ perceptions of the intersection of philosophy and medicine. On page 153 he writes, “No one cares how philosophically perceptive their surgeon is. They just want someone to fix them.” Do you agree with this assertion? In what ways would a “philosophically perceptive” surgeon help or harm his patient?

5. Dr. Collins also speaks of his difficulties with the death of a teenage patient, Sarah. On page 256, when she dies, he struggles with the pain that his treatments caused her. Do you believe that treatment should ever be discontinued so that patients can live out the rest of their lives in peace? If you were Sarah, would you have requested to go through the surgery? Taking this notion a big step further, do you agree with doctor-assisted suicide? Why or why not?

6. On page 168, Dr. Collins struggles to come to terms with his position on cosmetic surgery. He writes, “What I seemed to be saying was that babies with cleft lips and soldiers with burned faces deserve cosmetic surgery, but middle-aged socialites with double chins do not. But who was I to impose my value system on middle-aged socialites?” What is your position on cosmetic surgery? Is it ever acceptable? When and why?

7. Did your perception of doctors and the medical world change after reading this book? How?