



Zoom On: Jessica Nutik Zitter, Critical Care and Palliative Care Physician and Writer



Jessica Nutik Zitter

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Jessica Nutik Zitter, MD, MPH is a physician and writer with a professional interest in critical care and end-of-life care. She blogs for the [Huffington Post](#) and the [New York Times](#). Her first book, *Critical Decisions*, a memoir about her professional journey at the intersection of ICU and Palliative Care medicine is due to be published by Avery/ Penguin Random House in late 2016.

1. What are your key areas of interest and research?

- Enhancing patient-centred care in the ICU by encouraging ICU care that focuses on the whole patient, instead of particular organs or diseases.
- Enhancing communication and honesty, particularly around breaking serious news to patients.
- Supporting trainees - medical students, residents, and fellow s- to start thinking differently, to see another way, instead of the “do everything” approach.
- Encouraging the lay public to empower themselves so that they have more control over the treatments that happen when they or their loved ones get critically ill or begin to die.

2. What are the major challenges in your field?

I am both distressed and intrigued about the tendency in critical care medicine to prioritise the life of the organ over the patient. We have become so siloed and specialised, that we tend to hyperfocus on physiology at the expense of the person in the bed. I believe that we have lost our way as doctors and must bring our wonderful lifesaving skills more into relief with our patient.

3. What is your top management tip?

Open communication about the difficulties of managing patients, promoting honest conversations with other doctors and trainees about their ethical, emotional conundrums.

4. What would you single out as a career highlight?

Being asked to write my memoir and having the space to highlight what I believe are the many complexities of doing this important, but very difficult work.

5. If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

Rabbi.

6. What are your personal interests outside of work?

My family, reading novels, my two standard poodles, watching my daughter compete in dog agility trials, celebrating shabbat with my family and friends on Friday night, hiking on the [High Line](#) in New York City, mentoring young doctors.

7. Your favourite quote?

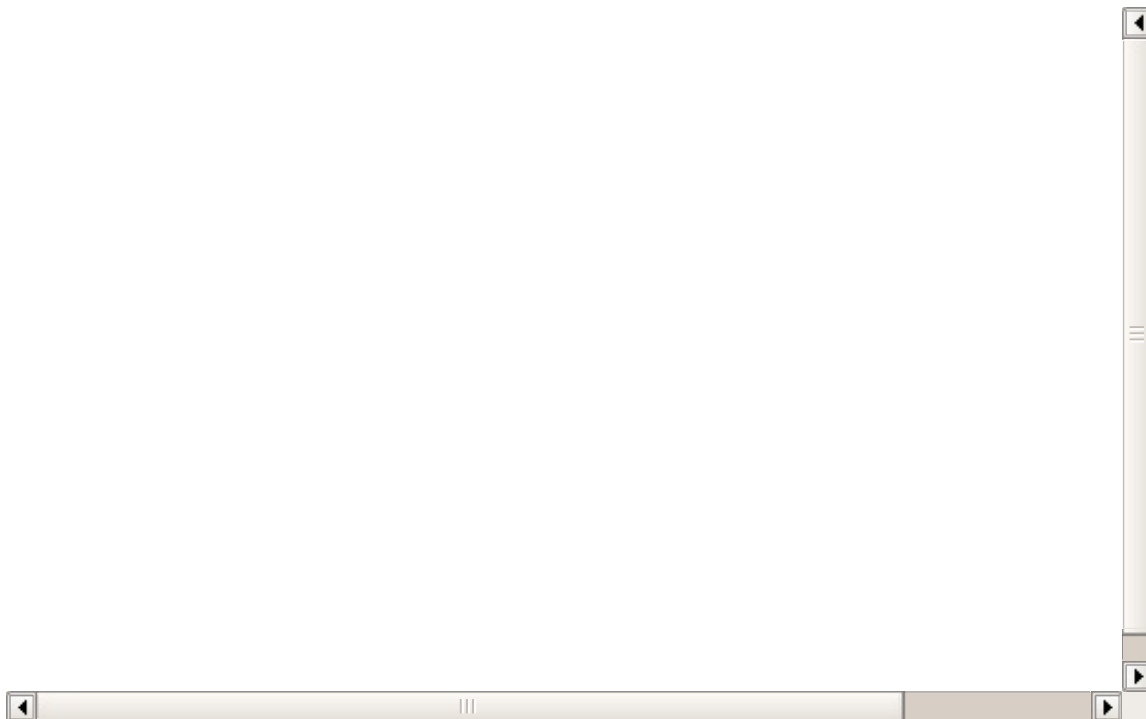
"The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease" - William Osler

Dr. Zitter trained at Harvard and the University of California San Francisco (UCSF). She is board-certified in internal medicine, pulmonary medicine, critical care, and hospice and palliative care medicine. Her academic positions include Assistant Clinical Professor and Volunteer faculty at UCSF, Clinical Instructor, Joint Medical Program-UC Berkeley and UCSF. She is Attending Physician in intensive care and palliative care at [Highland Hospital](#), Oakland, California.

Dr. Zitter co-founded [Vital Decisions](#), an innovative telephone counselling service that assists patients in proactive end-of-life decision making, serving the USA's largest healthcare plans.

Watch

"Avoiding the End of Life Medical Conveyor Belt" - Interview at Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, June 2015.



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