



Fragile Beginnings: Discoveries and Triumphs in the Newborn ICU (Harvard Health Publications)

Adam Wolfberg MD

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Half a million babies are born prematurely in the United States every year. In this gripping medical narrative, Dr. Adam Wolfberg brings readers into the complex world of newborn intensive care, where brilliant but imperfect doctors do all they can to coax life into their tiny, injured patients. As a specialist in high-risk obstetrics and the father of a child born prematurely, Wolfberg explores the profound questions raised by such fragile beginnings, both from the front lines of the NICU and from his daughter's bedside.

His daughter Larissa was born weighing under two pounds, and he describes the precipitous birth at six months that left her tenuously hanging on to life in an incubator. Ultrasound had diagnosed a devastating hemorrhage in her brain that doctors reasoned would give her only a 50 percent chance of having a normal IQ. Through Larissa's early hospital course, Wolfberg examines the limitations of newborn intensive care medicine, the science of "neuroplasticity," and the dilemmas that surround decision making at the beginning of life.

Wolfberg also takes us into the lab where researchers are working to improve the futures of children born too soon. He follows a young scientist, Jason Carmel, who was inspired to study how the brain adapts to injury when his twin brother was paralyzed in an accident. Through lucid medical reporting, Wolfberg details current scientific practices and discoveries, and explores the profound emotional and ethical issues raised by the advancing technology that allows us to save the lives of increasingly undeveloped preemies.

As they make decisions about life-saving care in the first hours of a premature infant's life, doctors and parents must grapple with profound moral and medical questions: How aggressively should doctors try to save the life of a premature baby, who will be severely neurologically and physically impaired? What might that child's quality of life be like after millions of dollars are spent on her care? Wolfberg traces the fits and starts of the physicians, government policy makers, and lawyers who have struggled over the years to find the best way to make these wrenching decisions. Written from Adam Wolfberg's unique experience as a reporter, as a medical specialist and researcher, and as the father of a prematurely born daughter, *Fragile Beginnings* lays bare the struggles, discoveries, and triumphs of the newborn intensive care unit.

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