

The Last Surgeon

A short medical dystopia about AI, robotics, the future of work, and what can be lost even when technology improves outcomes.

Dr. David Halpern has spent decades mastering surgery. As AI-powered robotic systems make care safer, faster, and less expensive, he confronts a future in which the human surgeon has become the riskier choice.



BEST FIT	LENGTH	FORMAT	ISBN
High school, college, medical, and health-professions courses	150 pages; about 29,000 words	Paperback and Kindle	979-8-2529-9044-6

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Surgery combines compassion, broad knowledge, technical skill, judgment, and rapid adaptation when a life is at stake. If even surgeons can be replaced, what profession can assume it is safe?

Why teach it

The novel imagines AI moving into the physical world through autonomous surgical systems. The technology works: it lowers cost, widens access, and improves measured outcomes. That success makes the moral problem harder rather than easier.

Short chapters and competing stakeholder interests make the book accessible for close reading, discussion, debate, and interdisciplinary work.

Learning goals

- Explain why successful automation creates a harder ethical dilemma than machine failure.
- Analyze how work shapes David's identity, relationships, purpose, and mental health.
- Evaluate claims about safety, cost, access, consent, and professional responsibility.

Course settings

- English, contemporary literature, or dystopian fiction
- AI and robotics ethics, technology and society, or future of work
- Bioethics, medical humanities, or narrative medicine
- Health science, public policy, or interdisciplinary seminars

- Test whether the capacities associated with surgery are truly unique to human beings.
- Identify how hospitals, insurers, developers, workers, and patients respond to incentives.
- Use specific scenes to build a defensible argument about technology and displacement.

A simple starting point for the classroom

Ask students to support their answers with specific scenes and to separate what the machines do from what institutions choose to do with them.

Discussion questions

1. Dr. Gibbons calls compassion surgery's holy grail. Where does the novel show that presence matters even when it cannot change an outcome?

2. If an autonomous system produces better results and costs far less, would choosing a human surgeon still be reasonable? What evidence would change your answer?

3. Why is Bobby's successful robotic surgery more important to David's conflict than a machine failure would have been?
4. How do price, insurance coverage, and the special consent form shape patient choice? When does a legal choice stop being a practical one?

5. Are human beings still needed to care for one another at their most vulnerable when machines provide better treatment? What would patients sacrifice or pay to preserve human connection?

6. What does the epilogue get right about human surgery, and what context has been lost? How does that missing context shape historical judgment?

Four short activities

HOSPITAL BOARD HEARING Assign students to represent patients, clinicians, hospital leaders, insurers, the technology company, or the community. Debate deployment terms and vote.	AUTOMATION STRESS TEST Choose a profession thought to be safe from AI. Compare its knowledge, physical skill, judgment, adaptability, emotional labor, and liability with surgery.
FOLLOW THE INCENTIVES Trace money, risk, authority, data, and accountability. Identify where reasonable individual decisions produce a system no one person controls.	EPILOGUE CLOSE READING Identify what the robot teacher gets right, what context is missing, and how those omissions shape the children's view of human surgeons.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR Amir Nasir, MD, MPH is a board-certified, fellowship-trained plastic and reconstructive surgeon, former optical engineer, returned Peace Corps volunteer, and healthcare AI consultant. The Last Surgeon is his first novel.	FOR INTERESTED EDUCATORS Additional instructor materials and virtual author discussions may be available for classes considering the book. Contact amirnasir@hotmail.com . Sample chapter: thelastsurgeon.org/sample Educator page: thelastsurgeon.org/educators

Content note: Occasional strong language; discussion of suicide and job-related despair; illness, death, surgery, and medical injury; and themes of economic collapse and job loss. Recommended for upper high school, college, and adult learners. Educators should review the text for their own setting.