

I'd have relished that job in real life; as a young boxer, I had a pretty mean left hook. But medicine is obviously a bit more complicated. Ultimately, I realized that we needed to approach the situation—the falling eggs—in an entirely different way, with a different mindset, and using a different set of tools.

That, very briefly, is what this book is about.

PART I

## CHAPTER 1

### **The Long Game**

From Fast Death to Slow Death

There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.

—BISHOP DESMOND TUTU

I'll never forget the first patient whom I ever saw die. It was early in my second year of medical school, and I was spending a Saturday evening volunteering at the hospital, which is something the school encouraged us to do. But we were only supposed to observe, because by that point we knew just enough to be dangerous.

At some point, a woman in her midthirties came into the ER complaining of shortness of breath. She was from East Palo Alto, a pocket of poverty in that very wealthy town. While the nurses snapped a set of EKG leads on her and fitted an oxygen mask over her nose and mouth, I sat by her side, trying to distract her with small talk. *What's your name? Do you have kids? How long have you been feeling this way?*

All of a sudden, her face tightened with fear and she began gasping for breath. Then her eyes rolled back and she lost consciousness.

Within seconds, nurses and doctors flooded into the ER bay and began running a “code” on her, snaking a breathing tube down her airway and injecting her full of potent drugs in a last-ditch effort at resuscitation. Meanwhile, one of the residents began doing chest compressions on her prone body. Every couple of minutes, everyone would step back as the attending physician slapped defibrillation paddles on her chest, and her body would twitch with the immense jolt of electricity. Everything was precisely choreographed; they knew the drill.

I shrank into a corner, trying to stay out of the way, but the resident doing CPR caught my eye and said, “Hey, man, can you come over here and relieve me? Just pump with the same force and rhythm as I am now, okay?”