

## HOSPITAL DRAMA

A doctor-turned-novelist pens a new medical series for the “Grey’s Anatomy” set.

**THE SCREENWRITER’S** strike might be the best thing to happen to debut author CJ Lyons. Fans of medical TV shows may be forced to turn to books. Lyons has the distinction of being a doctor-turned-novelist and her debut novel, *Lifelines*, is the first in her series.

“I did it backwards,” Lyons says. “I had a previously unpublished novel that had been shown to an editor at Berkley. They liked my voice and knew I had a strong medical background. So they came to me with this vague idea. They wanted ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ meets ‘ER’ strictly from a woman’s point of view, targeted to a female audience.”

Lyons was immediately on board. “I really wanted it to be grounded in reality,” she says. “So the biggest challenge was how to keep it real, fast-moving like a thriller, without teaching or preaching.”

In the series, each of Lyons’ four main female protagonists will get to star in a plot. “It’s a challenge having four main characters, though one gets center stage,” she says. “Each subplot has to impact the main drama.” In *Lifelines*, the story centers around Dr. Lydia Fiori, a new ER doctor. On her first shift, a patient—who happens to be the chief of surgery’s son—dies, and soon, her career is in jeopardy.

“She combines dramatic story-

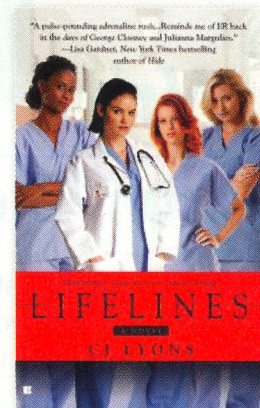
telling, one-of-a-kind characters and first-hand medical knowledge to make *Lifelines* and its sequels original in today’s fiction market,” says Anne Hawkins, Lyons’ agent.

For Lyons, writing was always her way to deal with the harsh realities of being an ER doc. “I chose medicine



as a career because of the connection with people,” she says. “In fact, medicine is storytelling—it’s all about history, despite what you see on TV. [It’s] listening to your patients and unraveling their stories to find out what the truth is.”

She put writing aside during medical school, until a tragic event drove her back to it. “In my intern-



ship year, one intern was brutally murdered—it was a devastating high-profile crime,” she says. “It happened on a Thursday, and being interns we were back to work on Monday. There wasn’t a lot of time to figure out how to deal with this anguish yet we still had to give comfort, do our work and not risk a patient’s life.”

Her way of dealing with the tragedy was to return to writing and she wrote her first medical suspense novel.

“As I practiced pediatric emergency medicine in an inner-city trauma center, I knew I was getting burnt out,” she says. “So in 2004 I wanted to get serious about writing and I entered the Romance Writers of America’s Golden Heart contest. I became a finalist, which brought me to the attention of editors and agents.”

The result was a book contract that ultimately fell through, but this didn’t deter her. “You can’t give up at the first stumbling block,” she says. “What seems like disaster could be the opportunity of a lifetime.”

With a series of books to write, Lyons has given up her medical practice to write full time. “It’s time for a second dream,” she says. **[WD]**

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