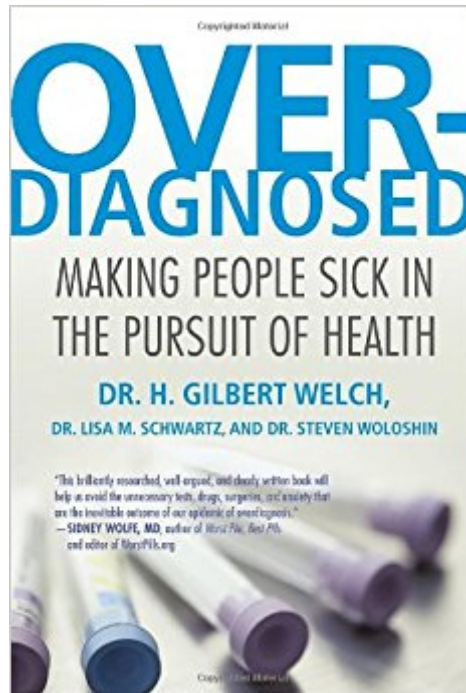


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Overdiagnosed: Making People Sick In The Pursuit Of Health



Synopsis

A complex web of factors has created the phenomenon of overdiagnosis: the popular media promotes fear of disease and perpetuates the myth that early, aggressive treatment is always best; in an attempt to avoid lawsuits, doctors have begun to leave no test undone, no abnormality overlooked; and profits are being made from screenings, medical procedures, and pharmaceuticals. Revealing the social, medical, and economic ramifications of a health-care system that overdiagnoses and overtreats patients, Dr. H. Gilbert Welch makes a reasoned call for change that would save us pain, worry, and money.

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Conventional wisdom is that more diagnosis, especially early diagnosis, means better medical care. Reality, says Dr. Gilbert Welch - author of "Overdiagnosed," is that more diagnosis leads to excessive treatment that can harm patients, make healthy people feel less so and even cause depression, and add to escalating health care costs. In fact, physician Welch believes overdiagnosis is the biggest problem for modern medicine, and relevant to almost all medical conditions. Welch devotes most of his book to documenting his concerns via examples of early diagnosis efforts for hypertension, prostate cancer, breast cancer, etc. that caused patient problems. Welch provides readers with four important and generalizable points. The first is that, while target guidelines are set by panels of experts, those experts bring with them biases and sometimes even monetary incentives from drug-makers, etc. Over the past decades many target levels have been changed

(eg. blood pressure, cholesterol levels, PSA levels), dramatically increasing the number classified as having a particular condition. (Welch adds that prostate cancer can be found at any PSA level - about 8% for those with a PSA level of 1 or less, over 30% for those with a level exceeding 4; most are benign.) The second is that treating those with eg. severe hypertension benefits those patients much more than treating those with very mild hypertension or 'prehypertension;' the result is treating those with lesser 'symptoms' can easily cause new problems that outweigh the value of the hypertension treatment. The third is that Welch believes it is usually more important to treat those with disease symptoms (eg. pain) than those without.

I read *Overdiagnosed* this morning, and I strongly urge you to read it, too. If you've ever wondered why our country's healthcare costs are skyrocketing even though our health outcomes lag behind the rest of the industrialized world, this book has the answers. We are overtested, overdiagnosed and overtreated. But sadly and paradoxically, this intensive use of "preventive" medicine has not improved our physical health or sense of well being -- it has diminished it. Dr. Welch builds a strong case that Americans are overdiagnosed in a clear, concise and compelling way. He provides anecdotal accounts of people who were seriously harmed by the overzealous use of modern, high tech testing. And he backs these stories up with findings from landmark medical research studies. As we move from chapter to chapter and disease to disease, we see the same patterns emerge: thresholds for "illness" are lowered and suddenly tens of millions of people are diagnosed and treated for mild or nonexistent "diseases" that never would have harmed them. Dr. Welch identifies the key players who brought American medicine to this sorry state -- big pharma and medical products manufacturers hungry to increase profits, doctors who order unnecessary tests to avoid malpractice lawsuits, and overzealous patient advocacy groups who press for action in the absence of any scientific evidence of improved outcomes. Dr. Welch explains key concepts like "lag time bias" and "overtreatment bias" that enable you to see why the benefits of aggressive preventive medicine are far less than you have been led to believe. Once you understand terms like these, you will never again be swayed by misleading advertising or public health campaigns.

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