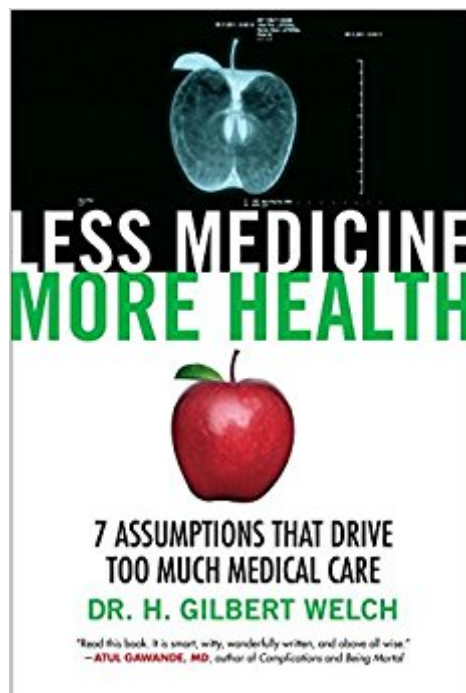




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Less Medicine, More Health: 7 Assumptions That Drive Too Much Medical Care



Synopsis

The author of the highly acclaimed *Overdiagnosed* describes seven widespread assumptions that encourage excessive, often ineffective, and sometimes harmful medical care. “You might think the biggest problem in medical care is that it costs too much. Or that health insurance is too expensive, too uneven, too complicated—and gives you too many forms to fill out. But the central problem is that too much medical care has too little value. Dr. H. Gilbert Welch is worried about too much medical care. It’s not to deny that some people get too little medical care, rather that the conventional concern about “too little” needs to be balanced with a concern about “too much”: too many people being made to worry about diseases they don’t have and are at only average risk to get; too many people being tested and exposed to the harmful effects of the testing process; too many people being subjected to treatments they don’t need or can’t benefit from. The American public has been sold the idea that seeking medical care is one of the most important steps to maintain wellness. Surprisingly, medical care is not, in fact, well correlated with good health. So more medicine does not equal more health; in reality the opposite may be true. The general public harbors assumptions about medical care that encourage overuse, assumptions like it’s always better to fix the problem, sooner (or newer) is always better, or it never hurts to get more information. *Less Medicine, More Health* pushes against established wisdom and suggests that medical care can be too aggressive. Drawing on his twenty-five years of medical practice and research, Dr. Welch notes that while economics and lawyers contribute to the excesses of American medicine, the problem is essentially created when the general public clings to these powerful assumptions about the value of tests and treatments—a number of which are just plain wrong. By telling fascinating (and occasionally amusing) stories backed by reliable data, Dr. Welch challenges patients and the health-care establishment to rethink some very fundamental practices. His provocative prescriptions hold the potential to save money and, more important, improve health outcomes for us all.

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Customer Reviews

“Avoiding medical jargon, Welch speaks directly to the layperson and focuses on certain assumptions that have increased consumption in a market-driven society; some of which have become so ingrained by popular media that refuting them seems downright scandalous.” Welch’s words, though wise beyond money, border on sacrilege in a country of generally healthy people who have developed an expensive health-care habit and who are expected to support a lucrative health-care industry. Welch’s conversational style makes his prescription for better health an easy pill to swallow.

•Booklist, starred review

“A bright, lively discussion of the excesses of medical care to which patients often unwittingly go due to certain false assumptions.” Welch demonstrates the flaws in these assumptions. His stories involve the risks, uncertainties and harms of cancer screenings, treatments for heart disease, drugs, medical devices and surgical procedures. He makes an especially strong case for the risks of mass screenings for cancer—the fear, the false alarms, the overdiagnoses and the resulting overtreatments. Vivid images make what could be discouragingly technical quite understandable.

Welch’s engaging style and touches of humor make this an easy read, and the facts he presents make a convincing case.

•Kirkus Reviews

“Read this book. It is smart, witty, wonderfully written, and above all wise. We’ve overmedicalized life and yet we need medicine throughout our lives. No one explains better when we do, when we don’t, and why.”

•Atul Gawande, author of *Complications* and *Being Mortal*

“Wise, witty, fascinating and alarmingly persuasive—this is a book everyone should read, especially my doctor.”

•Bill Bryson, author of *A Short History of Nearly Everything*

“With the style of a trustworthy country doctor, Welch, an academic heavyweight, urges us to reject the allure of reducing all health risks by using the latest technology to gather all the data and to fix the problems sooner rather than later. Showing the dangers of our ill-informed enthusiasm for medicine,

he brilliantly builds the case for respecting its power and limitations: to seek it when ill and all but avoid it when healthy. — Victor M. Montori, MD, Professor of Medicine, Mayo Clinic — “Gil Welch’s latest book shows us exactly how too much medical care can be harmful and even deadly. — This is a needed corrective to the American attitude that the more screening and testing, the healthier we will be. — Marcia Angell, author of *The Truth About Drug Companies* — “Its title, *Less Medicine, More Health*, sums up his trenchant, point-by-point critique of test-based health care and quality control. — New York Times

Dr. H. Gilbert Welch is an academic physician, a professor at Dartmouth Medical School, and a nationally recognized expert on the effects of medical testing. He has been published in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal, and has appeared on Today. Dr. Welch is the author of three previous books, including the highly acclaimed *Overdiagnosed*. He lives in Thetford, Vermont.

I wish I wouldn’t have read this book. I say that not because the book was bad, but because it was too good. Some of the chapters just hit a little too close to home. One chapter in particular filled me with fear and another filled me with sorrow. I started reading the book when my 80 year-old mother went in for major back surgery. I breezed through the first four chapters during her five hours of surgery and two hours in post-op care. The chapters were educational and enlightening. Dr. Welch makes a very compelling case about how we are being over-diagnosed and over-treated. The tone of the book was witty, so I was chucking and nodding my head as I read about data overload, U-shaped curves, the general uselessness of screening, the harm that false alarms can cause, the analogy of types of cancers to barn-yard animals: cancer that will never cause a problem are turtles, cancers that can be fought are rabbits, and cancers you can do nothing about are birds. Then I got to Chapter 5 and the assumption: Action Is Always Better Than Inaction. First Dr. Welch gave some statistics on hospital infections after surgery: 1.7 Million “health care associated infections” associated with 98,987 deaths in 2002. Whoa doggie, my mom was in surgery. Next he talked about “postoperative cognitive dysfunction” after surgery particularly in the elderly. (Getting scare now - does 80 count as elderly?) Then he talked about needless surgery due to back pain, and how the majority of the time it doesn’t work. I wanted to cry at this point, was mom doing this all for nothing? But I felt better when I read the statement: “Back surgery should only be done on patients who don’t have back pain”. My mom’s surgery was to relieve nerve compression caused by severe

scoliosis. But then the section on "invasive surgery" had me worried again: her cut was 15 inches long. And the section "Inaction = Allowing the Body to Heal" had me second guessing the decision to have the surgery. Talk about a roller coaster of emotions. I had to stop reading at this point. I started reading again a few weeks later only to begin Chapter 7 and the assumption: It's all About Avoiding Death. The central theme of the chapter is that sometimes the quality of life is more important than prolonging life by a few months. Particularly with painful, debilitating cancer treatments. This chapter had me sobbing with tears pouring from my eyes. It brought back so many sad memories that are still raw and close to the surface. Three years ago my little brother was diagnosed with colon cancer that had moved to his liver. He fought the "cancer" battle for two years (MD Anderson). He went through all the pain and suffering because he wanted to see his son graduate from high school, he wanted to see his daughter go to her first dance, he wanted to go to the beach one last time. During one treatment (they inserted a tube through his groin and were pumping chemo drugs directly into his liver) he went into cardiac arrest. The doctors brought him back, but later he told me he wished they would have let him die. He said the treatments were too much for his wife, his kids, his family, and him; that sometime the quality of life is more important than quantity. He said it is better to quickly die with dignity than to wither away in excruciating pain. All my brothers' words were being echoed back to me by Dr. Welch. I'm crying again. Excellent book but like I said I wish I had not read it.

I am a Nurse and had been very sick. I healed myself by what I ate and have done a great deal of research into the current world of medicine. This book should be required reading for anyone who is using medicine. It is nice to see someone examine and tell the story without jargon. It will make you rethink everything from your current medicines to your medical conditions being treated. We need to take charge of ourselves again the world of medicine has become incapable of understanding how the human body really works.

Well written and easy to understand. I have long felt that just because a medical intervention was available did not mean it had to be used in every case. I have worked in oncology and have seen drs who were determined to fight to the last breath even when there was no hope, as well as those who were supportive and gave the patient good counsel as to the benefits and drawbacks. I am now definitely a senior citizen and experienced how fast one can be shuffled down the path. Just went in to have a headache Rx renewed and was referred for a cat scan and a neurology consult. If I had read the book before I went in, I would have asked what were we looking for and what would we do

if we found it? And what could happen if we didn't do it. Also convinced me that I need to work on some Advance Directives.

I bought this because it was recommended by Jane Brody in her health column in the New York Times. I consider the ideas in this book absolutely essential to our time: too many medical procedures, too much unnecessary testing, too many medications. The book addresses a number of assumptions that we make about medicine and health and debunks one after another. The central misconception that we have today is that "more is always better" - an idea which this book attempts (successfully for me!) to rebut.

I am almost 64 and enjoy great health. I am a vegan, exercise regularly, sleep soundly, and I am activity retired and have a low stress life. I personally believe medical fishing expeditions for asymptomatic people are counter-productive. This book supports my life choices.

Loved the dialogue and the tone set by the doctor. This is a necessary read for anyone and everyone who thinks that they have to be on hyper alert and screened for any and every medical concern. My worry/hypervigilance meter is now turned way down - to a level of normal awareness. For example: the meter just brings my attention to things, like choose a banana over a snickers bar; driving a little too fast, take my foot off the gas and sit back and relax while driving. My attention is now focused where it should be - on my life outside my body. Oh, and my workout intensity - up several notches and it feels great! Even my sleep is better. My average resting heart rate? at age 55 - it is 53!!!

I love this book! As I (and my loved ones) age, I am realizing that I have perhaps too much faith in medicine as advertised. This book is not an alternate health book, it is scientific and well researched. It basically says be wary of risks and side effects, especially for optional procedures like screenings and removal of wisdom teeth, and having the latest invasive procedure rather than the tried and true. An added plus, it is entertaining. Dr. Welch is humorous and self-deprecating. I'd like to send a copy to every physician in the country!

This book was recommended by a friend who has cancer and wished she had read this book when she was first diagnosed. I gave this book a 5 star rating because it was very enlightening and well written by a doctor in a language that could be understood by a layman. Like my friend I could not

put the book down and learned so much about tests and treatments and the right questions to ask doctors before proceeding. I have recommended this book and bought additional books as gifts. I even showed this to my doctor who is going to order a copy. I will order the other books by Dr. Gilbert Welch. I am so much more informed on health issues now.

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