



Overtreated

Why Too Much Medicine Is Making Us Sicker and Poorer

By Shannon Brownlee
Bloomsbury Publishing

I purchased *Overdiagnosed along with Overtreated* (written by Shannon Brownlee). Brownlee's book was published in 2007 and Dr. Welch's book in 2011. Both books discuss similar issues. Americans are in love with testing and screening. Originally, the intent was to detect diseases faster and prevent deaths with earlier treatment. It may have seemed to be a good idea at the time, but things haven't actually worked out well.

Both authors review our massive screening programs. One man's expense is another man's income — and a huge income it is. Americans are spending hundreds of billions of dollars yearly. Treatments are not without risks and potential damage to the patient — it is common that some patients do not gain any additional health benefits.

Overtreated begins with the work of John Wennberg at Dartmouth Medical School. He studied national statistics and found that some areas of the U.S. have conducted a greater number of particular medical procedures, even though the incidence of disease was about the same. How much surgery was done seemed to be a way of local life. Patients were undergoing many procedures with little, if any benefit and often much harm.

Both books talk about back surgery, prostate cancer, breast cancer, and genetic screening. *Overtreated* also discusses overtreatment of thyroid cancer — interestingly, it holds as a shining solution, the VA's system of enforcing the use of Electronic Medical Records (EMR). Since 2006 (when the research was initially conducted), the VA has been overwhelmed with disabled veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, old and sick Vietnam era veterans — the VA is severely underfunded to treat all of them. The system is now falling apart. I wonder what Shannon Brownlee thinks of the VA now?

Having read and reviewed *How We Do Harm* by Dr. Otis Brawley and *The Great Prostate Hoax* by Richard Albin, Amazon had also suggested these two

books — they are older and the information is not new. The problem has been growing for a long time and both Brownlee and Welch have warned America for at least a decade. In the last few months (2015), it is amazing that some of the issues concerning over diagnosing breast and prostate cancer (*along with recommended treatments*) have begun hitting the news. If you want to protect yourself from unneeded, dangerous tests and treatments, *Overdiagnosed* and *Overtreated* are good reference books.

Robert P. Goldman, MD