

Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America

Nortin M. Hadler M.D.

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Nortin M. Hadler M.D. : **Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. AN UNORTHODOX VIEW WITH GOOD INSIGHTS By Theresa Welsh Dr Hadler thinks American health care is on the wrong path, offering up tests and treatments that provide no

benefit or miniscule benefit not worth the cost and aggravation. As a long-time critic of our so-called "healthcare system" in the US, I agree with him, but also found his book and his ideas flawed in a number of ways./ -- TOO MUCH MEDICAL JARGON SARCASM --Let's start with the language he uses, lots of medical terminology, some explained, some not explained. He also can't resist throwing in plenty of sarcasm about the wrong practices of his colleagues that often left me unable to grasp his actual point. Between wading through the medical language and trying to figure out who or what institution he was lambasting, I frequently found myself confused.I wish he had plainly stated his idea/opinion at the beginning of each new section, then delved into the often voluminous data that was supposed to prove his point. In plain English.He also uses an unusual format, with each regular chapter having a "shadow" chapter intended to provide more backing for his position. I found though that both regular and shadow chapters seemed to have a lot of the same kind of content. I think he wanted to use the chapter to tell his story of what needs fixing and why, then use the shadow chapter to give more of the actual studies and data that are the basis for his reasoning. However, I don't think he really succeeded with this format. Understanding his points is an unnecessarily difficult chore for the reader./ --- WHAT IS ILLNESS? ---Dr. Hadler has some interesting insights into illness that go to the issue of when we should seek medical care. He says that 75% of what we perceive as illness is really what he calls a "social construct" or could be deemed "artificial epidemic" (an insight from Rudolph Virchow over 100 years ago). People living under poor conditions and working at jobs and tasks they dislike are more likely to become "sick" than people living in "advantaged" situations. In plain language, people whose lives are characterized by wealth and social advantage will be "healthier" than poor people. It follows from this truth that medical measures such as drugs and surgery will not "cure" people whose main problem is their socioeconomic status.Dr. Hadler is especially tough on the idea of work-related "illness" that society has decided to "compensate" with such measures as Workman's Compensation. People claiming backaches, sore arms, wrist pain and the like are really unhappy with their work. Not that Dr. Hadler is unsympathetic; he does not say they do not actually hurt or are "making it all up," but that they are unable to cope with what are really the ordinary aches and pains of life.More advantaged people also have backaches, headaches and creaky knees, but they continue on with their lives, tuning out their pains and waiting for them to go away, which, Dr Hadler tells us, they generally do. What I glean from this is that there is no need to visit the doctor because you have one of these "ordinary" conditions (backache, headache, pains in your knees, hips, etc). Nothing the doctor can do will take these pains away, but time WILL take them away and we should all just cope in the meantime.I think of all the times we are all urged to "see your doctor" about this or that." I am old enough (old enough for Medicare) to have come to pretty much the same conclusion as Dr. Hadler, but I still find it difficult sometimes to know where the line is between "ordinary" and "might be a symptom of something worse." I admit I avoid doctors partly because the contact with the medical establishment is usually unpleasant and almost always ridiculously expensive (even if I'm not actually paying for it myself -- SOMEONE is paying for it.)/ -- TREATMENTS THAT DON'T WORK --Dr. Hadler is big on quoting studies -- those "randomized" groups of people who are followed over time, divided into two groups, those getting the treatment and those getting a placebo (something that looks like the treatment but isn't). He thinks we spend too much time on the cost (which he readily admits is excessive) rather than the effectiveness of what doctors do. He also doesn't think much of "efficiency" as a way to improve our health care. If it's inexpensive and efficient, but does not actually work, then it is still a waste of money. It is even worse than just a waste of money if the treatment causes actual harm or carries a risk of harm. Those studies or "clinical trials" of groups of people can shed light on whether a treatment actually provides benefit, or not.I am glad he included screening tests, which seem to constantly proliferate and be urged on us by various medical establishments and big charities. I am personally convinced most of these tests, some invasive and harmful, are just a money-maker for the people who promote them. Lots of studies have been done (and Dr Hadler gives a good summary of them) on screening mammograms and the conclusion is that mammograms do not save lives, but they do result in lots of medical treatment on women who might never have had any impact from the tiny spot seen on a mammogram. (A really good book on this is Dr Gilbert Welch's book, *Overdiagnosed*.)Dr. Hadler barely mentions the actual harm from mammograms in the form of unnecessary invasive biopsy and surgery, and from the radiation from each view of each mammogram session. Radiation harm is cumulative. Obviously, doing mammograms is a huge money-maker for companies that make the equipment and for the personnel involved in their use, but of what benefit to women? Isn't it time we woke up to the fact that the supposed life-saving efficacy of these tests might just be flim-flam?Dr. Hadler is pretty hard on the Cardiologists, with their angioplasty, catheterizations and stents. None of these, he tells us, prolong life. Neither does he think obsessing over your cholesterol will reduce your chances of heart attack or stroke. All kinds of really expensive procedures a Cardiologist might recommend are mostly useless and hold the possibility of causing you harm. Both my husband and I have been to a Cardiologist in the past and I came to the conclusion that nothing done for either of us had any benefit, but of course, my own experience is anecdotal. Dr. Hadler has all the data, in this book./ -- YOUR NATURAL LIFESPAN: ABOUT 85 YEARSDr. Hadler goes against the philosophy of "doing everything possible" to save a life, which many advocate. He boldly states that the human lifespan is about 85 years, and we all need to face the fact that sometime around our 85th birthday (if we are lucky enough to last that long) our biological clock has run out. There is not much point in endless medical intervention, or doing mammograms to "save"

us from breast cancer. These interventions are costly and futile. SOMETHING is going to get us, so fighting each possibly fatal condition we may have serves no purpose except to make profit for the medical establishment. On this, I agree completely with Dr. Hadler. Sometimes, we get a longer lifespan, of course (my mother is still alive and alert at age 96), but the point is to stop doing screening tests, stop taking medications that are supposed to reduce your "risk" of some disease or other and eliminate surgery for conditions of aging. Accept your own mortality./ -- WHAT ABOUT "ALTERNATIVE" MEDICAL SYSTEMS? --Not surprisingly, Dr. Hadler does not think highly of alternative medical systems like Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Naturopathy or even Physical Therapy. Here, I think he protests too much. I found it interesting that studies show people are more likely to feel they got benefit from Chiropractic care than from the treatments of an MD. Dr Hadler seems to think this is because the Chiropractor spends more time with them and explains what he is doing. Gosh! Why don't MDs do more of that?I don't want my social problems "medicalized" into phony diseases (like fibromyalgia and osteopenia, two targets of Dr. Hadler's wrath), but I do want some kind of medical equality in this country, with everyone having the same access to needed healthcare, and I don't see it. Nor do I think Dr. Hadler should be complaining about having to pay (in taxes or insurance) for treatments others get that he thinks are ineffective unless he includes all the things doctors do to wring more money out of us poor "patients" (I really don't like that word!). Well-insured patients are going to get more medical care (effective or not) than the underinsured or uninsured, and that runs up the cost for all of us. Randomized clinical trials are not practical for every treatment method, and some of these "alternatives" may impart some unmeasured benefit. I can cite one from my experience: Vitamin E seemed to be a big help for me with menopause symptoms./ -- SO WHAT ARE WE TO DO TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH? --Dr. Hadler discounts so much of what passes for medical treatment in the US that it leaves me wondering what he wants most of us to do. I have long felt that medical care provides the absolute worst value for the money of anything we spend money on in this country. I have put all my frustrations and anger (and there is lots of it!) with the so-called "health care system" into a long rant linked off my website, theseekerbooks.com. I appreciate that Dr Hadler is willing to take on his own profession and point out their numerous sins. He, with his medical credentials and honors, can obviously make more difference than I can. He may be right that a lot of "sickness" is about social conditions, and I applaud him for speaking out about that. But I do think he is a bit over the top in just dismissing any sort of medical intervention for people suffering with "aches and pains."/ -- HOW DO WE FIX IT? --Dr. Hadler ends his book with a proposal about how to reform health care delivery in the US. He seems to think any kind of take-away in terms of what's covered by insurance (public or private) will be seen as "rationing." He DOES want to limit coverage to treatments with some proof of effectiveness, and that would eliminate most of the so-called "preventive care" items that are currently covered by Obamacare, like mammograms, colonoscopies and prostate screening. I think coverage for these expensive but ineffective screening programs SHOULD end, for the reasons Dr Hadler gives. They line the pockets of big industries, but do not help us ordinary people with our pathetically poor coping skills. Dr. Hadler does want to devote part of the money going into his proposed health care plan to letting people choose and fund ways to improve their social environment, presumably thereby improving their coping skills. Money not spent on medical stuff would flow into that fund, thus keeping critics from charging that the plan was trying to "save money" by not paying for their colonoscopy or whatever.Fixing our dysfunctional system of delivering health care will not be easy and will be opposed by the Big Money interests who profit so handsomely off our current system. Healthcare is always listed as a "growing" industry, but shouldn't the goal of any healthcare system be providing everyone with effective services and not be all about profit?2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I couldn't figure out why everything my doctor did made me worse. I went in feeling fine and measured my ...By SafirenziThis book helped me so much. I couldn't figure out why everything my doctor did made me worse. I went in feeling fine and measured my cholesterol, which was quite high. (it runs in the family) I was put on Statins. Then I started having aches and pains. My blood sugars where high. I am thin with no family history of diabetes. My blood sugar was 85 before the statin and the low fat diet. I quit the statins and felt great. I started reading about Mammograms and just told the doctor I wasn't having any more of them. AFTER looking at actual statistics, I think routine mammograms are harmful. My doctor went nuts. They keep hounding and hounding with robo calls and messages for me to come in for all these "prevention" tests. Then there was colonoscopy. I know someone that almost died due to a dirty scope. I told her "I'll take my chances." Now I do think that sometimes intervention is good. I think SOME INTERVENTIONS ARE GOOD, but not nearly as many as we are told. I have a problem now though. I do not trust my doctor at all. I think a lot of what they do is in their best interest and not in mine. I am glad I found this book, because it made me feel less crazy. I am afraid of my doctor. It's sad because I think I am not getting the help I need for things that could be helped. I just can't stand the relentless hounding for prevention tests.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Finally a sane voiceBy skeptic by birthWhen I read the critique of dr Hadlers book in JAMA, it stressed howhe takes the medical school oath phrase "first do no harm" to heart.When I read his book, I felt that someone was secretly reading my mindand published my suspicions about our healthcare today. And it came withreferences. I would love to have copies of this book to hand out to peoplewho follow the screening tests, yearly physical exams, etc public recommendations religiously and believing thateverything can be "prevented" or "cured."I am looking forward to his other publications, although I do not dare voicemy opinion in public, as these healthcare

beliefs have become as volatile in a conversation, such as if you want to not have argument at a party, do not bring up religion or politics- well now you can add "preventive healthcare" as well.

At a time when access to health care in the United States is being widely debated, Nortin Hadler argues that an even more important issue is being overlooked. Although necessary health care should be available to all who need it, he says, the current health-care debate assumes that everyone requires massive amounts of expensive care to stay healthy. Hadler urges that before we commit to paying for whatever pharmaceutical companies and the medical establishment tell us we need, American consumers need to adopt an attitude of skepticism and arm themselves with enough information to make some of their own decisions about what care is truly necessary. Each chapter of *Worried Sick* is an object lesson regarding the uses and abuses of a particular type of treatment, such as mammography, colorectal screening, statin drugs, or coronary stents. For consumers and medical professionals interested in understanding the scientific basis for Hadler's arguments, each topical chapter has an accompanying source chapter in which Hadler discusses the medical literature and studies that inform his critique. According to Hadler, a major stumbling block to rational health-care policy in the United States is contention over the very concept of what constitutes good health. By learning to distinguish good medical advice from persuasive medical marketing, consumers can make better decisions about their personal health and use that wisdom to inform their perspectives on health-policy issues. The accompanying reference guide is included as a PDF on this disc.

This is recommended reading even if you are determined in advance to despise it. You will be better off having wrestled with his arguments and . . . probably will not find them easy to refute.--*Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*[Dr. Hadler] is a longtime debunker of much that the establishment holds dear. . . . ing the data behind many of the widely endorsed medical truths of our day, he concludes that most come up too short on benefit and too high on risk to justify widespread credence. . . . Raise[s] serious questions.--*The New York Times*To change unrealistic expectations about longevity or lives without pain or illness bucks vested interests, but that is what Hadler does. . . . He knows that the changes he proposes are a long shot, but when people demand that medicine stop doing unnecessary things well, reform becomes possible. Recommended.--*Choice*This book challenges readers to alter their notions about health maintenance, discarding beliefs about the efficacy of certain medications, screening tests, and procedures. . . . This thoughtful message from an experienced medical practitioner has merit and may convince the general public to advocate more forcefully for change.--*ForeWord Magazine*A withering critique. . . . [Hadler has] the knowledge, power, and moral obligation to reject the false coin of commerce and technological hype and to reassert the primacy of the patient.--*New England Journal of Medicine*The question *Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America* aims to answer is how to get your four score and five. Surprisingly, it argues against relying on many of the accepted practices of modern American medicine. . . . Iconoclastic.--*Raleigh News and Observer*Challenging conventional medical wisdom, [Hadler] advises a healthy skepticism about the benefits of drugs, routine tests, and many common medical procedures. . . . Educate[s] [readers] on being far better health-care consumers. . . . [A] provocative look at the U.S. medical system.--*Library Journal*Having guidelines for reimbursement that went through a Hadlerian analysis is not a bad place to start reducing medical care costs without reducing the quality of patient outcomes. A much more politically attractive, and potentially quite effective, reform would make it routine for patients to be exposed to Hadler's kind of analyses whenever they are asked to consider any significant medical intervention.--*Journal of the American Medical Association*[Hadler's] self-confessed 'diatribe against medicalisation' is an engaging read.--*Medical Journal of Australia*Provides readers with the perspectives and skills necessary to advocate for themselves in the contemporary health care delivery system.--*Journal of Economic Literature* *Worried Sick* is for anyone who wants to make wise decisions about how to care for themselves and their loved ones. Dr. Hadler lucidly reveals the expensive tests that determine little and the quick fixes that boost nothing but cost to point the way toward a health system that we can't afford not to have.--*Scott Simon, National Public Radio, author of Pretty Birds and Windy City*A serious diagnosis of what ails modern American medicine which will surprise and educate even the most savvy reader. Hadler exposes the fallacies that drive unnecessary and often harmful treatments and offers a hard-hitting series of remedies that could benefit us all.--*Jerome Groopman, M.D., Harvard Medical School, author of How Doctors Think*Hadler documents that many Americans receive health care that is useless and often harmful because their physicians do not follow scientific standards of effectiveness. He makes a strong case that these standards should be the basis of payment and should guide patients in selecting physicians and consenting to treatment.--*Daniel M. Fox, Milbank Memorial Fund*If, by some wild stretch of the imagination, the U.S. Congress convened and empowered a national convention to transform the American health-care system (i.e. industry), Nortin Hadler's *Worried Sick* would have to serve as the template and the moral bible. His subtitle says it all, 'A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America.' Case by case, drug by drug, test by test, and procedure by procedure, Hadler exposes the excesses, the unjustified costliness, and the ineffectiveness of the present medical scene. With an encyclopedic review of the published medical literature, Hadler shows us that the public is medicalized to an extreme and to no gain in the overall health of the nation. Hadler presents a proposal for a health-care insurance system that will increase the health of the

nation, provide only effective care, and reduce costs. All self-funded employers must read, absorb, and install Hadler's well-founded ideas. As Hadler points out, it is probably too late for any federal plan to do anything but further increase costs and extend ineffectiveness.--Clifton K. Meador, M.D., author of *A Little Book of Doctors' Rules, Med School, and Symptoms of Unknown Origin* From the Inside Flap Norton Hadler's clearly reasoned argument surmounts the cacophony of the health care debate. Hadler urges everyone to ask health care providers how likely it is that proposed treatments will afford meaningful benefits and he teaches how to actively listen to the answer. Each chapter of "Worried Sick" is an object lesson on the uses and abuses of common offerings, from screening tests to medical and surgical interventions. By learning to distinguish good medical advice from persuasive medical marketing, consumers can make better decisions about their personal health care and use that wisdom to inform their perspectives on health-policy issues.