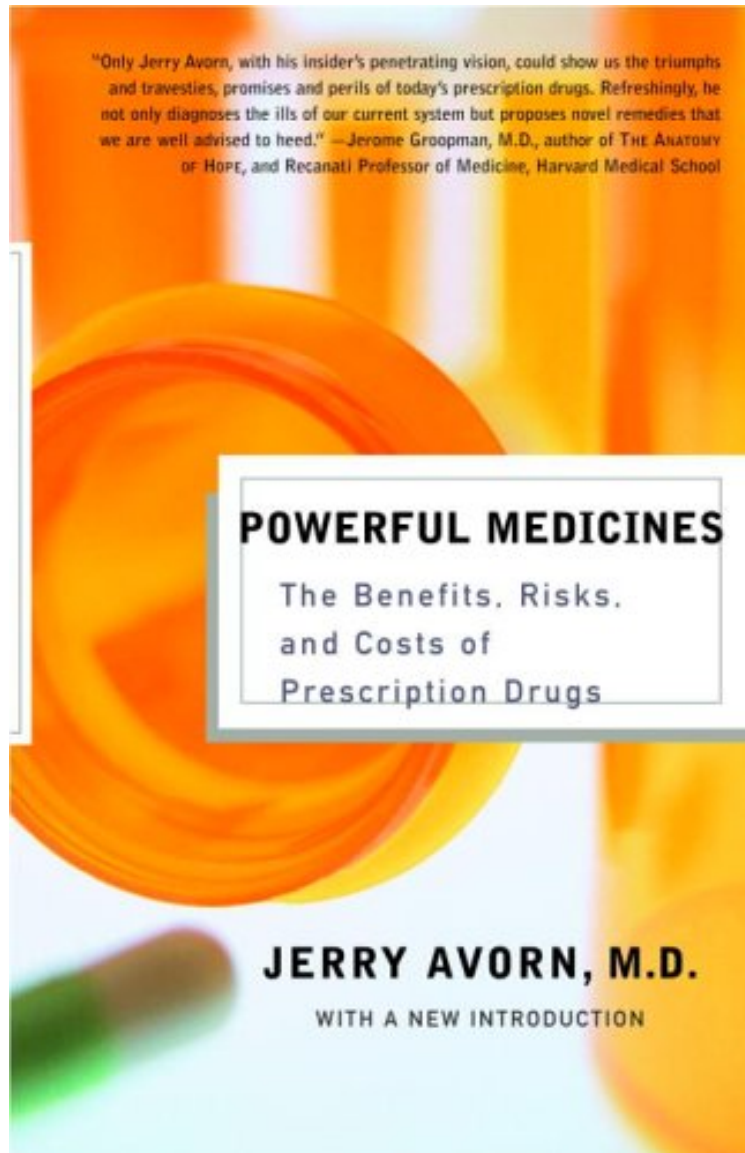


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# Powerful Medicines: The Benefits, Risks, and Costs of Prescription Drugs

*Jerry Avorn*

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#393605 in Books Vintage 2005-08-09 2005-08-09 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.90 x 1.01 x 5.171, .77 #File Name: 1400030781480 pages | File size: 16.Mb

**Jerry Avorn : Powerful Medicines: The Benefits, Risks, and Costs of Prescription Drugs** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Powerful Medicines: The Benefits, Risks, and Costs of Prescription Drugs:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A delightful read. I bought four copies for my friends. By Tom

DoerrThe book is gilded with so many metaphors, anecdotes and literary allusions, and it is written in such an engaging style, that it is a delightful read. Avorn is a wonderful teacher. This is also a mind-expanding book. I learned so much about a field that I thought I already understood pretty well. It felt like the biblical scales fell away from my eyes and I was able to see so much better: the history of the FDA's role in protecting the public (or is it the drug manufacturers?) from medications that are unsafe, ineffective or too expensive. The tradeoffs between risk, effectiveness and cost of drugs, and doctors' astonishing lack of information about these is a major theme of the book. But he taught me about many other areas as well. For example, the differences between prospective, controlled and observational studies and the ego-personalities behind each type--and why we need both types. These are just a couple examples. I might add that Dr. Avorn is really not out to bash Pharma or doctors or anybody. He's just describing reality as it is. He does have some terrific ideas for solutions. I wonder how many billions of dollars we would save annually, and how much better U.S. health care would be if Jerry Avorn was head of the FDA. Hmmm...This book must have been a labor of love for Avorn-a gift to his readers. My friends have thanked me for giving them copies. I should caution that if you haven't been to college, this isn't for you. This book is for doctors, clinicians, legislators, health care policy professionals, and for people who care about the decisions that doctors make about their health. Tom Doerr, M.D. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars By BIG PWRIts an interesting book 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Spectacular reveal of Prescription World By Steven N. Laux It is a good consequence of freedom of the press that such books as this are able to be printed. The content of this book is well worth reading.

If you believe that the latest blockbuster medication is worth a premium price over your generic brand, or that doctors have access to all the information they need about a drugs safety and effectiveness each time they write a prescription, Dr. Jerry Avorn has some sobering news. Drawing on more than twenty-five years of patient care, teaching, and research at Harvard Medical School, he shares his firsthand experience of the wide gap in our knowledge of the effectiveness of one medication as compared to another. In *Powerful Medicines*, he reminds us that every pill we take represents a delicate compromise between the promise of healing, the risk of side effects, and an increasingly daunting price. The stakes on each front grow higher every year as new drugs with impressive power, worrisome side effects, and troubling costs are introduced. This is a comprehensive behind-the-scenes look at issues that affect everyone: our shortage of data comparing the worth of similar drugs for the same condition; alarming lapses in the detection of lethal side effects; the underuse of life-saving medications; lavish marketing campaigns that influence what doctors prescribe; and the resulting upward spiral of costs that places vital drugs beyond the reach of many Americans. In this engagingly written book, Dr. Avorn asks questions that will interest every consumer: How can a product judged safe by the Food and Drug Administration turn out to have unexpectedly lethal side effects? Why has the nations drug bill been growing at nearly 20 percent per year? How can physicians and patients pick the best medication in its class? How do doctors actually make their prescribing decisions, and why do those decisions sometimes go wrong? Why do so many Americans suffer preventable illnesses and deaths that proper drug use could have averted? How can the nation gain control over its escalating drug budget without resorting to rationing or draconian governmental controls? Using clinical case histories taken from his own work as a practitioner, researcher, and advocate, Dr. Avorn demonstrates the impressive power of the well-conceived prescription as well as the debacles that can result when medications are misused. He describes an innovative program that employs the pharmaceutical industrys own marketing techniques to reduce use of some of the most overprescribed and overpriced products. *Powerful Medicines* offers timely and practical advice on how the nation can improve its drug-approval process, and how patients can work with doctors to make sure their prescriptions are safe, effective, and as affordable as possible. This is a passionate and provocative call for action as well as a compelling work of clear-headed science. From the Hardcover edition.

.com Profiteering pharmaceutical companies and the FDA have met their match in Dr. Jerry Avorn, a Harvard Medical school researcher and clinician. In *Powerful Medicines*, he brilliantly combines patient vignettes, scientific critique, and statistics to create a risk/benefit balance for prescription drugs. His premise: "Every drug is a triangle with three faces--representing the healing it can bring, the hazards it can inflict and the economic impact of each." Avorn's gifts as a writer are apparent in the prologue, an edgy account of the mismanaged medications of several stroke patients. He then details the intellectual history of drug assessment and benefits, including the biblical food police in the Book of Daniel, the deer in the headlights Estrogen debacle and the current infatuation with Ginseng and other alternative medicines. Turning from benefits to risks, Avorn examines diet pills, Viagra, cold medicines and diabetes drugs with comparisons the decisions of Dr. Fautus--who makes life-changing bargains between safety and effectiveness. Other insightful chapters offer views of prescription drug economies, and comparative healthcare around the globe. The final chapters create an insightful template for emerging public policy. Throughout, Avorn pulls at common threads: the line between personal and public responsibility, the perils of drug promotion, and the marketplace that usurps the role of scientific evidence in selecting treatments. Anyone looking for a quick muckraking read will be disappointed. But Avorn's views, literate and complex, will frame the debate on prescription drugs for

years to come. --Barbara MackoffFrom Publishers WeeklyIn this pragmatic volume, Avorn sets out an impressive plan for the American health care system to get helpful drugs to those who need them, protect patients from dangerous side effects and keep costs within reasonable limits. Avorn, chief of the division of pharmacoepidemiology and pharmacoconomics at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, argues, "[F]or a sum no greater than our current drug budget, medications could provide all Americans with the most productive and cost-effective interventions in all of health care." Avorn claims, "[W]e waste billions of dollars a year on prescription drugs that are excessively priced, poorly prescribed, or improperly taken." To remedy this situation, reform is needed in how new drugs are approved and marketed. In addition, practicing physicians need access to state-of-the-art information about new medications, including how well they compare to established (and often cheaper) products. Computer technology, Avorn shows, can bring together the latest information on treatment options and drug contraindications. But changes in the pharmaceutical industry itself of which Avorn does not hold a flattering view may be necessary to eliminate pressure to prescribe the most heavily advertised and costly new product when old standbys are equally effective. Though this informative and witty book is overly long, it makes a compelling case for prescription sanity and shows how constructive change can realistically be achieved. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.From BooklistHarvard pharmaco-epidemiologist Avorn's weighty volume authoritatively deconstructs and demystifies the current American prescription-drug debacle, placing it within the larger context of overall medical cost concerns. He frankly discusses what often goes awry when overworked physicians can't keep abreast of voluminous research, when patients are underinformed about generic drug availability, and when profits provide the sole motivation for pharmaceutical research. Although the U.S. currently outspends other industrialized nations by two-and-a-half times, per capita, for medical care, more than half those nations rank higher in life expectancy, lower in infant mortality. Avorn lays a large portion of blame for those facts at the feet of American capitalism and goes so far as to state that the U.S. doesn't have a health-care system at all but rather "a collection of lone entrepreneurs, warring conglomerates, cottage industries, aggressive vendors, embattled charities, and isolated consumers--all engaged in hurly-burly piecemeal transactions." Rather than simply whining, however, Avorn offers a selection of curative measures to help contain costs while increasing effectiveness. A comprehensive, interesting read. Donna ChavezCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved