

Young, H. T. (2009). Young Death by Prescription a Father Takes on His Daughter's Killer – The Multi-Billion-Dollar Pharmaceutical Industry. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited.

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Terence H. Young brings to life every parent's nightmare in this first-person account of his fifteen-year-old daughter Vanessa's sudden death, after experiencing an adverse reaction to her prescription medication, Preplusid. Written in a conversational style, he shares his inability to protect his child from a harm he didn't know existed until it was too late. The book does threefold: (1) warn parents about the dangers of prescription drugs, (2) show how the Canadian justice and medical systems are broken, (3) and show how billion-dollar pharmaceutical companies, like Johnson & Johnson Inc. are primarily responsible for failing to properly protect and inform the public from preventable adverse affects and even possible death.

We are quickly presented with overwhelming evidence supporting Youth's argument that there are serious problems within our current Pharmaceutical, Federal Health, and Medical systems. Young believes, these continue to fail the Canadian public by allowing preventable deaths to occur, simply because there is little regulating these billion-dollar businesses, which ultimately has left a broken system. This central theme runs throughout the book, as he points to multifaceted, systemic problems which are putting Canadians and their families at risk everyday.

The desire to protect and keep ourselves and our families safe from harm, especially when it comes to our health and prescription medicines is a top priority for most Canadians. Yet, it is not uncommon for many of us to rely on our doctor's discretion when it comes to helping

determine the best treatments and medications to take. However, Young cautions us to consider otherwise. While the average person tends to know little more about their prescription medicine aside from what their doctor has told them, even a simple google search could provide valuable information regarding possible risks and updated information (p. 305).

Ultimately, Young advises that it is important to take control of what medications you are taking and also be mindful that though doctors are often helpful, they can also make mistakes or overlook information. So, it is ultimately our responsibility to take care of ourselves and our children's safety.

Over the past few decades, medicine itself has drastically become more accessible and has spiked in its distribution of drugs. As one doctor put it, "we give it out like candy" (p. 54). The question then becomes more about "which drug to give" without questioning if we even need it (pp. 149-150). Therefore, now more than ever, we should stay informed about medication distribution and drug risks so that we can make informed choices.

This spike in drug distribution worldwide, along with the ability to mark-up prices exponentially (p. 151), has created enormous profit for numerous billion-dollar drug companies, like Johnson & Johnson Inc. (p. 67), which has enabled them to become powerful political and economic players. Therefore, being only a small player on the global drug market, the Canadian government has much less authoritative control, which has almost reduced it to becoming a mere "marketing partners" (pp. 79, 211), rather than an regulating and keep these big companies accountable (pp. 146-147). This is especially true when they have the buying ability to pay off government lawsuits (p. 70).

Because the Federal Government has the dual responsibility to protect Canadians while also protecting the country's global commercial and economic interests (p. 267), it has to balance the cost of losing a major pharmaceutical company's business which could create massive adverse economic consequences.

Moreover, because profit is the primary driving force behind medications, public safety becomes a secondary priority (p. 72). In fact, Young highlights several cases in which this is blatantly apparent. First, drugs are primarily chosen based on their potential profit, regardless of their lifesaving value (p. 135). Second, even the process of naming drugs mostly relies on marketing tactics to increase profit, not to help doctors or consumers identify it (p. 198).

With thousands of drugs already on market and those still pending, naming drugs has become highly problematic. Although the name's suffix is meant to help doctors quickly identify which class of drug it is in, this process is becoming increasingly challenging, there is an increased risk for doctors misreading or mistaking one for another (p. 201). So, when we talk about terms like "safe" and "effective" in relation to drugs, they hold very loose meanings to the drug companies who label them and so should we (p. 128).

A third major concern is the leniency in reporting adverse reactions from a drug that could cause minor to major complications, even possible death. When drugs are first approved for public use, they are actually still considered to be in a final testing phase and because there is such a rush to get new drugs approved for the public market, some drugs can be pushed for public use before they have been thoroughly vetted (p. 212).

The risks of taking drugs are nothing new. Most of us are used to seeing disclaimers on the boxes, but don't actually believe that death by heartburn medication could likely happen.

However, as with Vanessa's case, there had been at least eighty-one deaths from Preplucid, and when Young approached both the company representatives and Health Canada, both shrugged it off as an "unfortunate side effect" that was being looked into, yet the drug remained in the market (pp. 191-192).

Drug companies produce and distribute drugs (p. 66), yet it is the legal responsibility of doctors to protect and inform patients of potential risks (p. 143). Yet many doctors admit to not reporting their patients' negative effects, either because taking time to write reports for every single occurrence would increase their workload or they fear being held responsible for having prescribed it (pp. 66, 71, 97, 161).

Understandably, it can be challenging for doctors with their busy schedules to report, as well as, difficult to stay updated by reading through the thousands of cautioning letters from drug companies to learn about every drug's newest adverse warnings. Of the four or five doctors who worked Vanessa's case, all acknowledged they had received five warning letters regarding Preplucid, but they all didn't read them and stop prescribing it (pp. 80-83).

Some doctors even disclosed to Young that they often continue to prescribe medications even after receiving information about their possible adverse affects (p.159), while others admitted that they prescribe "off-label" drugs to treat symptoms they're not designed for, despite the risks (p.67). These types of practices have become problematic, especially for the general public who entrust their lives and health to their doctor (p. 149-150).

However, despite these practices, there are many doctors who *do* strive to provide their patients with integrity and quality care. Young describes one Floridan Doctor who has taken it

upon himself to create warning labels to warn his patients about consuming grapefruit juice with a particular medication (p. 119).

With this brief review, we have explored some of Young's core concepts, although this could be argued as a one-sided perspective. He does acknowledge that if he wants to get his message across successfully, he would need to remove all emotional inference. Also, since this book was written in 1999, it would be interesting to follow-up with some of the concerns Young mentions to see what type of changes have occurred.

For the most part, I do think that this is achieved. However, throughout the book. There is a definite negative connotation towards the pharmaceutical companies. Thought this isn't entirely misplaced, it doesn't reference the many benefits it provides our nation with access to many helpful medications to fight disease and illness.

At one point or another throughout our lives, we will undoubtedly end up at the doctor's office and will be given some form of medicine, it is important that we are informed before we make the decision to take prescription medication. That is why I truly believe this book would be a beneficial read for both the general public, as well as, a worthwhile supplement for university and graduate level students, specifically Sociology, Psychology, and the Humanities.

But I would go further to say that one demographic who could benefit the most could be students preparing for a career, not only dealing directly with these drug companies but also the distribution of medicine itself. These would include students within: nursing, medicine, pharmaceutical and psychiatry programs. This could provide future professionals with a skeptical perspective that might stimulate change.