

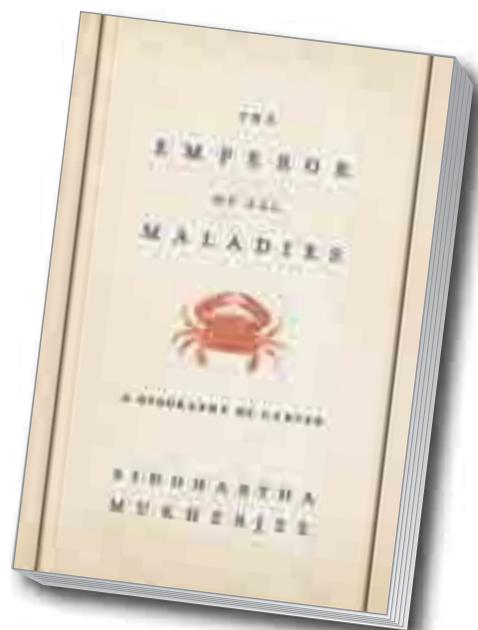
The Emperor of All Maladies:

A Biography of Cancer

By Siddhartha Mukherjee

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REVIEWED BY ROBERT EHRLICH



Cancer is the subject of Siddhartha Mukherjee's sweeping review of a disease known for thousands of years. Few books on medicine discuss how cancer was first observed and how it was treated. We also have a tendency to forget how only recently cancer was treated effectively. Ancient Romans thought cancer was a disease of black bile, one of the four humors that made up the body. That idea of the body being out of balance if one of the four humors was in the wrong proportion lasted until the 18th

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century. Cancer was occasionally treated with surgery going back to Egyptian times. Most surgical outcomes were disastrous, from damage done by ignorant surgeons, the failure to get all of the cancer, and the infection that almost always followed through the lack of sterilization.

Dr. Mukherjee is an oncologist who decided to tackle the epic history of cancer. He subtitles the book "A Biography of Cancer." The first effective cancer treatments developed in the late 1800's as surgeons could successfully

excise visible tumors and had mastered basic anesthesia and surgical antiseptic. What was missing was knowledge of how cancer spreads even if only one cell is left over from surgery. The idea that cancer could hide for a while and then spread later was not understood.

In the 1940's, Dr. Farber discovered that chemicals could kill cancer cells. He was a pioneer of chemotherapy and

the stories of how many children he tried to save through early

chemo is heart wrenching since most died from treatment or only had temporary remission. What Farber discovered was that there was hope as new chemical treatments could arrest or cure some cancer.

Mukherjee deserves credit for writing an epic story of man's most terrifying disease. While we still dread a cancer diagnosis, we at least know what is causing it and why it can kill. What *The Emperor of All Maladies* does so well is personalize the disease as Mukherjee describes cases he has seen in his practice and then contrasts them with historical cases.

This is not a book for patients looking for treatment advice on a particular cancer. It is a book to learn how man developed from cancer ignorance to practical knowledge in the last 150 years. We also learn of the terrible suffering felt by patients both through the disease and ineffective treatments done by well-meaning but ignorant physicians. Less than 100 years ago, the only treatment was crudely cutting it out with almost a certainty of recurrence. Dr. Mukherjee reminds us of how young the study of cancer treatment really is and how much progress has been made in the last 50 years.

Robert Ehrlich, chairman and chief executive of DTC Perspectives Inc., regularly reviews books about the pharmaceutical industry, marketing and advertising for DTC Perspectives magazine. He also writes a weekly e-newsletter providing insights on pharmaceutical marketing trends. To subscribe to this FREE weekly analysis, sign up at the website, www.DTCPerspectives.com. Ehrlich can be reached by e-mail at Bob@DTCPerspectives.com.