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# Bad Pharma: How Drug Companies Mislead Doctors And Harm Patients



## Synopsis

"Smart, funny, clear, unflinching: Ben Goldacre is my hero." — Mary Roach, author of *Stiff*, *Spook*, and *Bonk*

We like to imagine that medicine is based on evidence and the results of fair testing and clinical trials. In reality, those tests and trials are often profoundly flawed. We like to imagine that doctors who write prescriptions for everything from antidepressants to cancer drugs to heart medication are familiar with the research literature about these drugs, when in reality much of the research is hidden from them by drug companies. We like to imagine that doctors are impartially educated, when in reality much of their education is funded by the pharmaceutical industry. We like to imagine that regulators have some code of ethics and let only effective drugs onto the market, when in reality they approve useless drugs, with data on side effects casually withheld from doctors and patients. All these problems have been shielded from public scrutiny because they are too complex to capture in a sound bite. Ben Goldacre shows that the true scale of this murderous disaster fully reveals itself only when the details are untangled. He believes we should all be able to understand precisely how data manipulation works and how research misconduct in the medical industry affects us on a global scale. With Goldacre's characteristic flair and a forensic attention to detail, *Bad Pharma* reveals a shockingly broken system in need of regulation. This is the pharmaceutical industry as it has never been seen before.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is a common claim among alt med cranks that skeptics are only critical of alternative medicine.

This is not and has never been true - most of Bad Science is about "Big Pharma" and its shenanigans, but this latest book by Ben Goldacre goes a lot further. In "Bad Pharma" you will read about the ways in which vested interests bamboozle us and our doctors, whether by accident or design. You will find out why the benefits of most medicines are overstated, and why the systematic review is incredibly important. You will become, in short order, very angry indeed, and then you will be told what you can do about that anger - whether you are a patient or a doctor. Goldacre's style is engaging and informal, and he is a practising doctor. The books include anecdotes about how he himself has unknowingly prescribed drugs which are not just ineffective, but worse than doing nothing - despite having read the research evidence with a particularly critical eye. All the data and references are there if you need them but they don't derail the narrative, so the book functions both as a reference and as an eminently readable story. This is my pick for best book of the year so far, and one of the most important books most of us will have read. This is about your health. Get informed, get angry and get active!

Dr Goldacre is an Epidemiologist, as am I. Or was. I changed fields because I saw examples, first hand, of what Dr Goldacre exposes in his book. Proper clinical trials are very difficult and expensive to do. You get obvious bad data in the raw observations, sample sizes are less than you want. Your power calculation on the sample size you have and the results you got suggest your P-value is bogus. You have to make judgements in some very grey areas. Every day. You work with research MDs that won't have a career if they don't get results. As an Epidemiologist you work part time on numerous small grants that don't add up to an adequate salary, so many of us do (did) statistical work for drug company trials. You don't get recommended for further consulting work if you are "overly rigorous", shall we say. In the late 70's new FDA requirements caused everyone to step up their game, but at increasing expense to doing trials. To contain costs, 30 years later, trials are now outsourced to about a half dozen separate specialist companies each doing one part of the study. A Clinical program management company, a data staging company, various companies that do the raw analysis (e.g. reading of CAT, MRI data), a company that prepares the results according to FDA submission requirements. All of them competing for the next contract, and competing on cost. You can see where this is going.... I never witnessed any truly unethical behavior. There is no evil here. Personally, I chose to go into the software industry to avoid having to make daily ethical decisions. Dr. Goldacre wrote the book that many Epidemiologists could write. Hats off to him for actually doing it. This ex-Epidemiologist only takes generic drugs, because the only good clinical trial is done on the general public, and after it comes off-patent, it's been around long enough to know

it's efficacy and side effects.

Bad Pharma highlights serious issues with the way the pharmaceutical industry works today. In the book Ben highlights the problems with the industry from several angles, how the tests can be tweaked, how negative tests are not published, how you can make a neutral test appear positive by sub-dividing the goals and then emphasize the fluke positive one. He also shows how the medical journals are part of the problem and the issue with ghost written articles. He shows the problems with the regulatory side as well, for example the European Medicines Agency, their lack of transparency, and how they have effectively blocked access to critical data for researchers. All through the book Ben makes use of well documented examples, and all the issues highlighted are well documented and exemplified. The book is written in an easy to access language, and so it reads well. He does repeat himself a bit, so one more round of editing and cleanup before release would probably have been a good idea. Some readers on .co.uk have criticised this, but I don't see it as an issue. You don't need to have a degree in medicine or a higher degree in general to understand the issues Ben highlights. Ben Goldacre runs the Bad Science website (badscience dot net) and has previously written the book Bad Science. Where Bad Science was an attack on quackery and pseudo science, and his website to a large degree has dealt with the same topics, this book is a critical look at the pharmaceutical industry. As such it ought to silence those that have attacked Ben Goldacre for being in the pockets of the Pharmaceutical industry over time. Ben Goldacre has done society a big favour by writing this book. I definitely recommend reading it if you want to understand more about how US and European health care works and what can be done to improve it in the future.

Ben Goldacre fills a vitally important niche in popular science literature. His books serve as a way of explaining highly technical and complex medical issues in language that is easily understood and with emphasis and focus that makes the seriousness of the issues at hand impossible to ignore. Goldacre also holds himself to a far higher standard of scientific excellence than the groups he is critiquing, exhaustively referencing, justifying and clarifying his points so that there is no doubt of the accuracy of his claims. This book sinks a knife into the heart of the nonsense and pseudo-science that is far too often espoused by the pharmaceutical industry and tacitly endorsed by overawed journalists and cowed academics. If you want to know why the drugs are you taking sometimes don't work and often make you ill then you need to read this book. And any medical practitioner, academic or researcher who does not read this book should be thoroughly ashamed of

themselves. It is absolutely excellent.

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