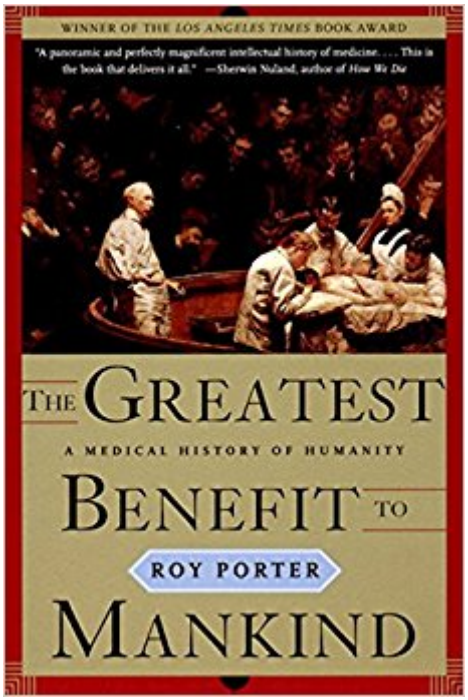
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The Greatest Benefit To Mankind: A Medical History Of Humanity (The Norton History Of Science)



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Synopsis

"To combine enormous knowledge with a delightful style and a highly idiosyncratic point of view is Roy Porter's special gift, and it makes [this] book . . . alive and fascinating and provocative on every page."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Oliver Sacks, M.D. Hailed as "a remarkable achievement" (Boston Sunday Globe) and as "a triumph: simultaneously entertaining and instructive, witty and thought-provoking . . . a splendid and thoroughly engrossing book" (Los Angeles Times), Roy Porter's charting of the history of medicine affords us an opportunity as never before to assess its culture and science and its costs and benefits to mankind. Porter explores medicine's evolution against the backdrop of the wider religious, scientific, philosophical, and political beliefs of the culture in which it develops, covering ground from the diseases of the hunter-gatherers to today's threat of AIDS and ebola, from the clearly defined conviction of the Hippocratic oath to the muddy ethical dilemmas of modern-day medicine. Offering up a treasure trove of historical surprises along the way, this book "has instantly become the standard single-volume work in its field" (The Lancet). "The author's perceptiveness is, as usual, scalpel-sharp; his manner genially bedside; his erudition invigorating." - Simon Schama 24 pages of b/w illustrations

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Customer Reviews

Samuel Johnson once called the medical profession "the greatest benefit to mankind." In the 20th century, the quality of that benefit has improved more and more rapidly than at any other comparable time in history. With all the capabilities of modern medicine's practicioners, however, we

as a people are as worried about our health as ever. Roy Porter, a social historian of medicine the London’s Wellcome Institute, has written an dauntingly thick history of how medical thinking and practice has risen to the challenges of disease through the centuries. But delve into its pages, and you’ll find one marvelous bit of history after another. The obvious highlights are touched upon--Hippocrates introduces his oath, Pasteur homogenizes, Jonas Salk produces the polio vaccine, and so on--but there’s also Dr. Francis Willis’s curing of The Madness of King George, W. T. G. Morton’s hucksterish use of ether in surgery, and research on digestion conducted using a man with a stomach fistula (if you don’t know what that means, you may not want to know). Porter is straightforward about his deliberate focus on Western medical traditions, citing their predominant influence on global medicine, and with The Greatest Benefit to Mankind, he has produced a volume worthy of that tradition’s legacy. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Porter examines what healers have done and the impact of their ideas and actions. His focus is on Western medicine "because Western medicine has developed in ways which made it uniquely powerful and...uniquely global." (LJ 2/15/98) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A more complete general medical history I could not ask for! It amazes me how much information is packed into this tome, and any healthcare professional or medical historian would benefit from reading this book. The one downside is that, due to the breadth of this work, it often passes over interesting stories so as to continue along with the progression of medical history. However, an exhaustive list of additional works is included in the back in order to seek out and expand one’s depth of knowledge about the history of medicine. This work will give you a very complete understanding of the overall arc of medicine, from ancient to modern times!

There are happily a good many excellent historians of medicine, as reviewing the few good journals will bear out. But regrettably few have tried to take on the monumental task of reviewing it all, at one fell swoop. Small wonder. It risks considerable criticism and contumely, from dolts who can’t stay engaged beyond a hundred pages to those whose fertile yet unseeded minds carp at the products of others. This serves well as a course text, and not solely for its linearity and comprehensiveness; but also for its 1) unique organization, into recurring cycles on disciplines (focused on the mental disorders, on surgery, in one era, then again in another era); and 2) for Porter’s willingness to wade into the swamp of opinion. It’s not just about what happened. It’s also about what will happen, and

Porter’s capacity to have foretold many of the rising controversies in systems of health care is a great tool for showing medical students how to examine and criticize trends. They don’t have to agree with his projections, to be able to admire the number of economic and cultural considerations Porter brings into them. I want thoughtful doctors at the end of their educations, not opinionated ones. Lovely, good-humored prose such as Porter’s engages them, the evolutions described encourage them, and his clear descriptions enrich the basis for their professional commitment. Criticisms: noted by previous critics, the phtos/illustrations were unfortunately condensed by the publisher into small sections; and Porter’s social medical passion at times erupts and exposes him to charges of bias. But I don’t know that he misrepresents opinion as fact, at any point, and his data sourcing is very good. My high rating reflects admiration for the combination of ambition, scope, accuracy, and readability, realizing that the perfect history-of-medicine text has yet to be written. This is quite fine, while awaiting a successor to Roy Porter.

As a medical historian his books are a joy to read.

This book is an encyclopedic, thorough excursion into the history of medicine. It deftly describes how western medicine evolved from primitive heroic techniques, guides us through the revolution from the Paris Clinic and German Laboratory, and leads to the shining beacon of today’s advanced techniques. It is filled with exhausting details and lists and is a must for any person attempting to understand medicine’s placement in human life.

A good history of medicine book, must be written by a good writer as is the case of Mr. Porter, as well as by a good universal historian, as is also this case.An enchanting journey through the history of medicine.

Great! A masterpiece on its field!

This wonderful book by Roy Porter is simply the best available history of medicine. It is long and detailed, as befits a huge topic. It is Eurocentric, as is most of modern medicine. It stresses the scientific origins of the development of modern medicine.While doing all of these things, it remains a very readable book. Porter’s writing style is lucid and at times entertaining -- quite welcome attributes in a tome on the history of medicine.Having waded through other histories of medicine, I believe this is the best. And the paperback version is a wonderful bargain!

Very interesting read. Thank you!

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