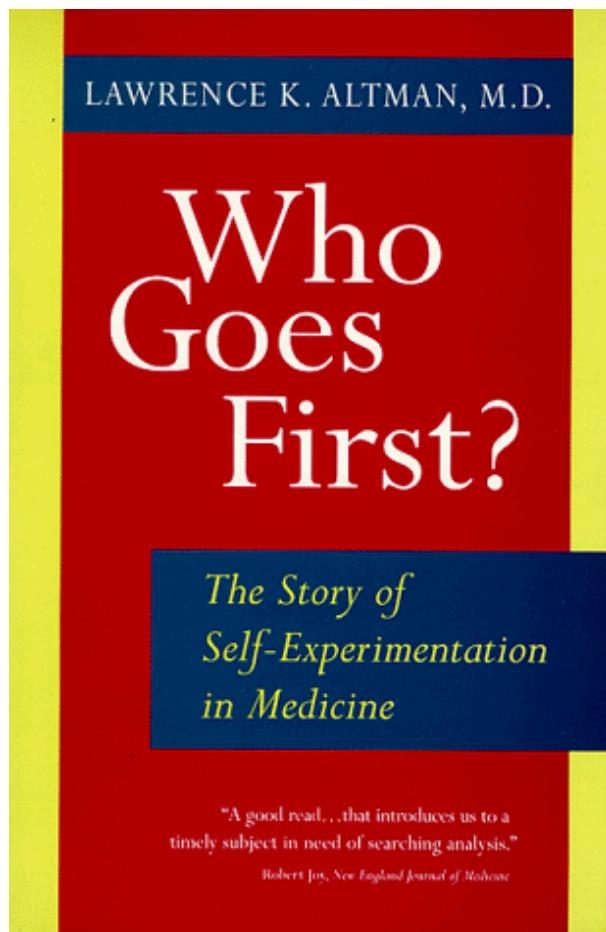


WHO GOES FIRST?: THE STORY OF SELF-EXPERIMENTATION IN MEDICINE BY LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN



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LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN, M.D.

Who Goes First?

*The Story of
Self-Experimentation
in Medicine*

"A good read...that introduces us to a timely subject in need of searching analysis."

Robert Jay, New England Journal of Medicine

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Amazon.com Review

"Medical research." When most of us hear those words, our imagination conjures up bored graduates with white jackets in a sterile porcelain laboratory, knowing no more about their subjects than ID number and blood type. This depersonalization of modern science is a myth, of course, but a powerful one that guides the way science is perceived and performed. This myth neglects or marginalizes the work of those men and women who take the human aspects of their research so seriously that they feel compelled to experiment on themselves. Who Goes First? tells their stories and thus gives us a view of medical research that diverges from the alienation of the nameless number heads.

Lawrence K. Altman has pursued research on the subject of medical self-experimentation since his days as a medical student, and this personal interest shines throughout the book. His writing is smart and enthusiastic, shedding light on a little-discussed aspect of research that raises important questions of ethics and scientific validity. Can a researcher be as objective about his or her own reactions to a drug as to a stranger's reactions? Should a scientist subject others to risks that he or she wouldn't take personally? What, if anything, do we have to gain from self-experimentation?

As you might imagine, this book is not for the squeamish. Even if you're not put off by the ocean of body fluids, you may find the terrors of curare-induced paralysis or life under quarantine a bit troubling. Still, for those willing or eager to confront such details, Who Goes First? provides an outstanding, highly readable introduction to the rehumanization of medical research. --Rob Lightner

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The ethical implications of self-experimentation are not the focus of this fascinating book. Yet the subject arises frequently as Altman explores developments in a variety of medical disciplines such as cardiology, anesthesiology, pharmacology, and parasitology. Names long associated with autoexperimentation, such as Louis Pasteur and Walter Reed, lose some luster and other names gain recognition in this collection of biographical and clinical accounts. A popular medical writer, Dr. Altman blends an easy style with meticulous research. His use of primary source material, personal interviews, and retrospective literature is

impressive. This book far surpasses J. Franklin and J. Sutherland's *Guinea Pig Doctors* (LJ 3/1/84) and is highly recommended for academic, medical, and public libraries. Mary Hemmings, McGill Univ. Medical Lib., Montreal

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Lawrence Altman has authored the only complete history of the controversial and understudied practice of self-experimentation. In telling the stories of pioneering researchers, Altman offers a history of many of the most important medical advancements in recent years as well as centuries past—from anesthesia to yellow fever to heart disease. With a new preface, he brings readers up to date and continues his discussion of the ethics and controversy that continue to surround a practice that benefits millions but is understood by few.

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Review

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A Magnificent Book

By K. L Sadler

This is one of the few nonfictional books that I have ever read that I have literally had a hard time putting it down. Dr. Altman not only wrote a book of significant importance about the need for self-experimentation, and the history of it...but he wrote it so well that I wanted to know what and who did the next group of experiments. It also explained a lot of procedures I learned about in medical school, but sometimes without the knowledge of the history behind it complete understanding is impossible. The author also explains quite clearly why we can't use just animals in experimentation, and gives numerous illustrations of physicians and scientists who...surprise!...actually think about others compassionately and are able to put themselves in the shoes of the patients. After undergoing an experimental cochlear implant which failed (in its early days), this book makes it a lot easier for me to explain to others why I undertook such a risk and didn't sue when it failed and made me ill. The book also makes clear the need for both patient and doctor awareness of informed consent...for all patients, including those who are disabled or those who lack a complete education. Dr. Altman wrote a book that should definitely be required reading by all medical personnel in ethics classes.

Karen L. Sadler, Science Education, University of Pittsburgh, klsst23@pitt.edu

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Informative, well-written and a page turner as well

By Metallurgist

This book is a classic - informative and well written. Dr. Altman writes with clarity, imparting a lot of medical information in an exciting manner. This is a rare non-fiction book that is a page-turner as well as being very informative. The book details stories of doctors and medical scientists who used themselves to test inoculations against diseases, new medicines, and to learn more about the working of the human body and disease processes. They studied the workings of the heart, the cause and treatment of yellow fever and other viral diseases, parasitic diseases such as malaria, fungal and bacterial diseases, diet deficiency diseases such as scurvy and pellagra, blood diseases, cancer, and many more. Many of these experiments were dangerous and a few researchers died from them. The book not only describes these experiments, but also goes into the motivation of the researchers and the deeper question as to the ethics of self-experimentation. Dr. Altman feels not only that it is ethical for a researcher to go first, but also endorses this procedure, and in the final chapter of the book he explains the benefits of doing so. In fact, he goes further and questions the behavior of experimenters who can go first, but choose not to experiment on themselves, even to the extent of suggesting that one should not participate in an experiment unless the experimenter has gone first (unless there is a good reason why this is not possible or advisable).

This book was written more than 20 years ago, but it is timeless in the information provided, the questions that it raises, and the high quality of the writing. I recommend this book to those interested in medicine,

science, and history, and to all those who just like to read a well-written and exciting book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Great read. Fascinating stories.

By topdog

Fascinating history of an aspect of medical research not widely known. Many great breakthroughs in medicine were the result of researchers experimenting on themselves. Interesting bioethical issues.

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