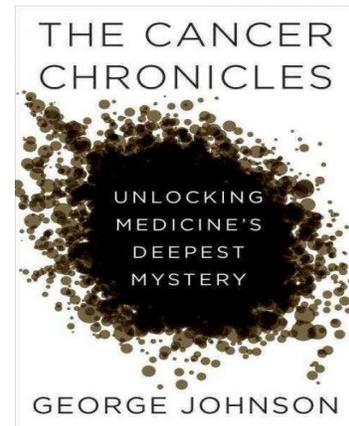


February 5, 2016

Spotlight on Books:

The Cancer Chronicles: Unlocking Medicine's Deepest Mystery by George Johnson



George Johnson is a science writer of international renown who combines a stellar knowledge of his subject with radiant writerly gifts. He approaches his subject as a reporter and as a husband and partners his personal story of his wife's uterine cancer with highly accessible information.

While Johnson acknowledges the environmental causes of a comparatively small number of cancers, he believes that the reason that cancer cure statistics are far less impressive than those of other serious diseases such as cardiovascular is a simple one. It is his conviction that with ever-increasing life spans it is inevitable that most of us will experience some form of cancer either in our own bodies or behold it in our loved ones. Given the universality and randomness of the disease he counsels embracing knowledge rather than running in fear and taking refuge in ignorance.

The author of *The Cancer Chronicles* references the work of eminent cancer biologists such as Robert A. Weinberg to educate his readers as to the risks inherent in mitosis and entropy. Mitosis is cell replication wherein the nuclear DNA copies itself, more or less accurately, and one cell divides in two whereas entropy is about, to quote Johnson, "the natural tendency for order to give way to disorder." Mistakes are made and accumulate over time and when our body's constraints against runaway replication fail, we call it cancer and the fact that it afflicts mainly elders aligns with our extended longevity.

Johnson's prose is compelling and if I were to choose one book to read in support of *World Cancer Day* (February 4th www.worldcancerday.org) this would be it. *The Cancer Chronicles* dispels a number of staunchly supported myths about the realities of the disease and most refreshing is his guilt-reducing encouragement around a cancer diagnosis. He shares his belief that, more often than not, it just happens – cancer is unpredictable and somewhat arbitrary.

The Cancer Chronicles is not an uplifting book but it is an important one and it is written with a clear eye and tender heart. The writing is superb and compelling.

- Review prepared by Deborah Bruser