



Me Medicine vs. We Medicine: Reclaiming Biotechnology for the Common Good

Donna Dickenson

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Personalized healthcare—or what the award-winning author Donna Dickenson calls “Me Medicine”—is radically transforming our longstanding, “one-size-fits-all” model. Technologies such as direct-to-consumer genetic testing, pharmacogenetics in cancer care, private umbilical cord blood banking, and neurocognitive enhancement claim to cater to an individual’s specific biological character. In some cases, these technologies have shown powerful potential, yet in others, they have produced negligible or even negative results. Whatever is behind the rise of Me Medicine, it isn’t just science. So why is Me Medicine rapidly edging out We Medicine, and how has our commitment to collective health suffered as a result?

In her balanced, provocative analysis, Dickenson examines the economic and political factors fueling the Me Medicine phenomenon and explores whether it may, over time, damage our individual health as well as our collective well-being. Historically, it is the measures of “We Medicine,” such as vaccination, that have radically extended our life spans, but Dickenson argues that we’ve lost sight of that truth in our enthusiasm for “Me Medicine.” She explores how personalized medicine illustrates capitalism’s flexible talent for creating new products and markets where none existed before—and how this, rather than scientific plausibility, goes a long way toward explaining private umbilical cord blood banking and retail genetics.

Drawing on up-to-date scientific evidence, Dickenson critically examines four possible hypotheses driving our Me Medicine moment: a growing sense of threat in our society; a wave of patient narcissism; corporate interests in creating new niche markets; and the dominance of personal choice as a cultural value. She concludes with important and original insights from political theory emphasizing a conception of the commons and the steps we can take to restore its value to modern biotechnology.

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