

# The Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know And Don't Know About Cancer

*Robert N. Proctor*

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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know And Don't Know About Cancer:

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informative, enjoyable, and eloquent book. Six stars.

Written by a highly regarded historian of science, this meticulously researched, eminently fair, and very provocative book attempts to answer the question: Why, given all the time and money spent on cancer research, can't we get consistent answers to the most fundamental questions about prevention and treatment?

From Publishers Weekly Proctor estimates that former Presidents Reagan and Bush, by dismantling and defunding occupational, environmental and consumer product safety agencies, may have caused 600,000 additional cancer deaths in the nation over 12 years. Professor of the history of science at Pennsylvania State University, he mounts a devastating critique of trade associations of the tobacco, meat, chlorine and asbestos industries, which, in his view, co-opt scientific research to create and exploit uncertainty over the carcinogenic risks of their products. Next he disputes the notion, popularized by Berkeley biochemist Bruce Ames, that natural carcinogens in foods pose a far greater health hazard than industrial pollutants or pesticides. Noting that the National Cancer Institute spends less than 3% of its budget on anti-smoking efforts, even though 30% of cancer deaths result from cigarettes, this forceful, scholarly study urges greater efforts to encourage cancer prevention, including a halt to tobacco subsidies, stiffer supervision of pesticides and federal support for alternatives to petrochemical agriculture. First serial to Sciences. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Science historian Proctor discusses not only the war fought against cancer but especially the several wars fought over cancer. He notes several prominent, disturbing facts: despite 20 or more years of heavily funded and widely proclaimed cancer research, cancer has become the second-most frequent cause of death in the United States and other developed nations; the five-year survival rates for most cancers have not changed since 1972; and, alas, the incidence of some cancers has increased. Despite widespread recognition that the principal causal agents of cancer are environmental, conflicts over the causes and prevention of cancer persist among scientists, between industrial corporations and regulatory agencies, and between environmentalists and manufacturers. The origin, persistence, and effects of these conflicts form the central questions examined here. Proctor holds that cancer research is often subtly and sometimes overtly affected by politics. Why, he asks, has the so-called cancer establishment devoted far more time and money to investigating the mechanisms of cancer than to its prevention? This fascinating but well-documented book should be profitably read by all informed readers. James D. Haug, East Carolina Univ. Lib., Greenville, N.C. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist In an enlightening, informative, and well-documented book, Proctor shows how and why the war against cancer has failed. Funding sources, he avers, have put too much emphasis on research (i.e., the scientific details of disease mechanisms and of treatment) rather than on the practical (i.e., methods of prevention and the exploration of broad causes). He examines the growth of genetics that has changed the focus of cancer studies from "cancer families" to biotechnology, and he does especially well in distinguishing between the statistical and the public health significances of cancer rates. He outlines the political wars at all levels of the cancer-fighting enterprise and points out that laws and regulations can be disastrous by both obscuring information necessary for the public to know and thwarting attempts to pursue previously untrodden research paths. Finally, his coverage of the politics, hypocrisy, and obfuscation of the tobacco industry is excellent. William Beatty