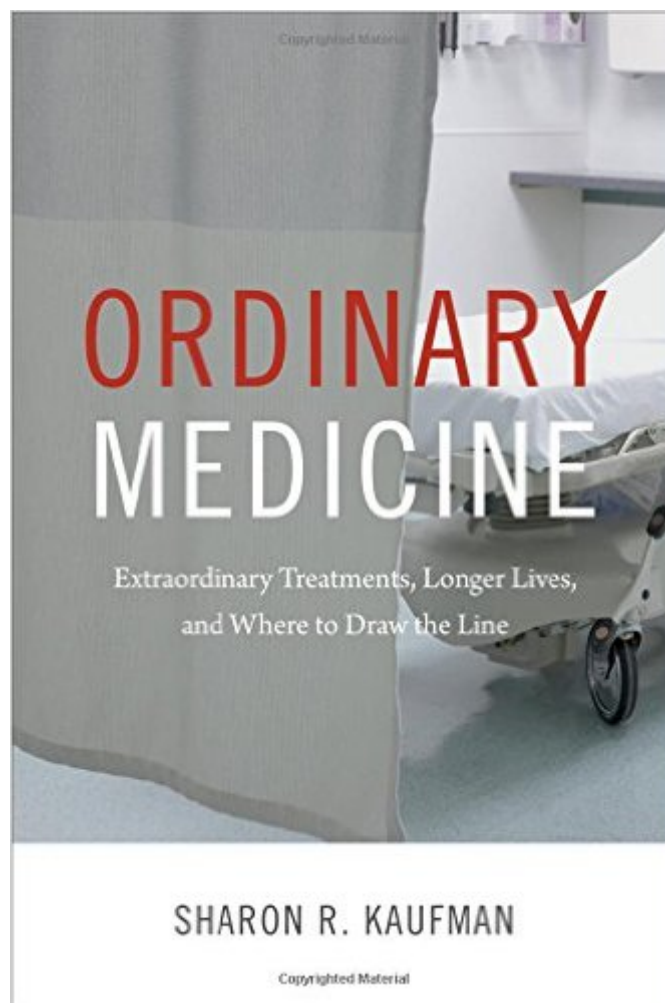


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# Ordinary Medicine: Extraordinary Treatments, Longer Lives, And Where To Draw The Line (Critical Global Health: Evidence, Efficacy, Ethnography)



## Synopsis

Most of us want and expect medicine's miracles to extend our lives. In today's aging society, however, the line between life-giving therapies and too much treatment is hard to see—it's being obscured by a perfect storm created by the pharmaceutical and biomedical industries, along with insurance companies. In *Ordinary Medicine* Sharon R. Kaufman investigates what drives that storm—more is better—• approach to medicine: a nearly invisible chain of social, economic, and bureaucratic forces that has made once-extraordinary treatments seem ordinary, necessary, and desirable. Since 2002 Kaufman has listened to hundreds of older patients, their physicians and family members express their hopes, fears, and reasoning as they faced the line between enough and too much intervention. Their stories anchor *Ordinary Medicine*. Today's medicine, Kaufman contends, shapes nearly every American's experience of growing older, and ultimately medicine is undermining its own ability to function as a social good. Kaufman's careful mapping of the sources of our health care dilemmas should make it far easier to rethink and renew medicine's goals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I found this book fascinating. As a physician I deeply appreciate the perspective, history and ethical evaluations this book provides to understand the forces that currently shape medicine in the US. I read the book with increasing interest. The author writes as a scholar, but the book is quite readable. She explains that "Ordinary Medicine" is beneath the radar and has been formed by the

forces of funding/reimbursement--focusing on Medicare, an aging society and the shift from patriarchal medicine to "shared decision making" which often foists a huge burden upon patients. Until I read this book, I had no idea that implantable defibrillators had become so ubiquitous in elderly patients and she describes a situation--a perfect storm--of unlimited Medicare funding for hospital based medicine, technological advances and clinical guidelines that encourage intervention. She evaluates the ethics and practice of transplant medicine where organs are allocated by time on the list and quite elderly patients receive organs from much younger donors. The system is in desperate need of change, and yet as she quoted a physician daughter of a terminally ill patient harshly responding "more is more" to a physician's attempt to palliate. Americans are terrified of rationing and lack of access to treatment in healthcare, but this book shows how so much of the "evidence based" decisions are often based on reimbursement, market forces and unexamined ethical quandaries. And conflicts of interest abound. Most of us in medicine need perspective and we're often in the trenches and unable to take this long view. This book provides much needed clarification and exploration of the unseen forces behind "Ordinary Medicine"

Sharon Kaufman manages to take the huge, complicated and largely unseen forces that run the American healthcare system and unveil the curtain that seems to hide the workings of health care institutions, workers and patients. She sets the stage in her introduction, noting the social, cultural and economic factors that have brought the U.S. to this point where what used to be cutting edge and extraordinary into standard of care and ordinary. But the economic factors remain the most formidable obstacle for patient access to treatment. This is highlighted by the increasing age of the American population with medical care enabling people to live longer, but not always better. Physicians seeking the patient's best interest is often countered by well meaning family members and patients demanding--and expecting-- the once "extraordinary" medical measures to keep going. Kaufman shows how the medical technology, supporting economy and public expectations spin into questions we dread asking, much less answering; in terms of life and medicine, how far is too far? How is human life valued by extending life without attention to quality of life? While the U.S. seems to have the best of everything to offer in medical treatments, living ever longer does not mean living better. This book will rattle your assumptions if you're a baby boomer and set to enter Medicare (if you're not there already) and ask some serious questions about how you want to live and die in America.

Everyone should read this who is wondering what has happened to our health care system in the

U.S. Offers amazing insights into mostly unrecognized forces at work which are driving up costs relentlessly, especially at end of life. Takes a look at how ongoing, sometimes futile treatments and interventions can prolong suffering for both patients and their families.... something no one seems willing to address. A difficult topic to write about, but Kaufman does it well done in a nonjudgmental way.

A must read for everybody. Written with clarity and knowledge this book is an eye opener to the ethical challenges presented by modern medicine.

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