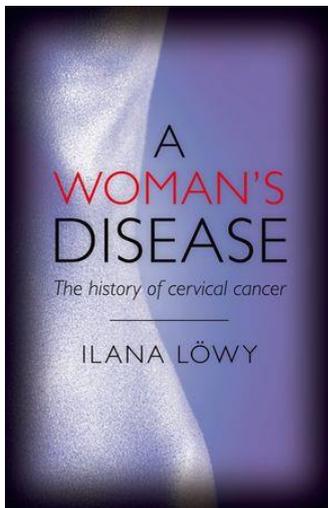


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Read what people affected by cancer think about...**



**A woman's disease. The history of cervical cancer (2011)**

Löwy I.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

240pp.

ISBN 9780199548811.

**Average star rating 3.7 (out of 5)**

**Macmillan Cancer Support  
89 Albert Embankment  
London SE1 7UQ**

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This is a fascinating insight into the history of cervical cancer and its place in medicine. It was so interesting to read about the history of the disease as far back as the 1700s. It has been very thoroughly researched and is also written from a multi-dimensional and objective viewpoint; for example, experts often had differing opinions on the best form of treatment. It is fascinating to learn how the disease and its treatment has been studied and researched over hundreds of years, and how different treatment methods and screening techniques were developed. In many ways, I found it very educational. What I like especially like is that it discusses the harsh realities of treatment and disease progression; these subjects are often taboo even today. It acknowledges the dreadful suffering of women with this disease throughout history. I found it relatively easy to understand but it may be more difficult for someone baffled by medical terminology. The glossary may help, although I also think that it is patronising to the health professional. Could there be some confusion regarding the audience?

This is essentially an academic resource, though very educational generally in understanding the place of cervical cancer in medical advancement. It is not suitable for those needing basic information about the disease and its treatment and does not provide support or advice. For this reason, it is more suited to health professionals; it may give them a greater appreciation of the brutality of cervical cancer treatments.

**Cervical cancer patient (26-35) (November 2012)**



Although this would be useful for someone with cervical cancer, it is not necessarily the information they might want. It is good background reading and touches on some taboo issues, which may help people feel more comfortable discussing their issues, but if someone is looking for information on how to cope with the disease, this is not for them. It is well written and easy to understand. It is a heavy topic, but this cannot be avoided. The layout is simple and effective and there are clear headings. I now feel much more knowledgeable about the subject and not scared to approach it with others. However, it might be a little uncomfortable for patients.

**Daughter of breast cancer patient (Under 25) (December 2012)**

I am not sure this book would be useful for anyone affected by cervical cancer. It is fascinating, but essentially a history book. Cancer patients or carers may find it worrying in parts as it does not set out to reassure.

It is an easy read, despite the weighty subject matter, and a fascinating insight into the history of this illness and the development of treatments. It is well written and clear and easy to understand, especially as it has a helpful glossary. However, before my treatment I would have found the terminology quite difficult. The paper is good quality and the layout is clear, with short chapters. However, the title and book jacket are unappealing. The illustrations are few and are not particularly helpful.

It is interesting rather than useful. It may be useful to health professionals or to others who, like me, have survived. If I still had cancer I would have been alarmed and upset by the descriptions of the symptoms as the disease progresses. The fact that Jade Goody's treatment was no more successful than that of Ada Lovelace or Eva Peron paints a bleak picture. My cancer was advanced and I would have felt very frightened and pessimistic. I gave it four stars because I can now view my cancer more objectively and I enjoyed reading it. I would have been unable to cope with so much knowledge at diagnosis. Others might be made of sterner stuff!

#### **Cervical cancer survivor (56-65) (December 2012)**

This is a real eye opener; it covers the history of cervical cancer from when it was first detected in the 1800s, and how it was dealt with by the medical profession; it is not a modern disease as some think. It will help those caring for women with cervical cancer to have a good idea of what has happened in the past. However, it may lead the patient to believe that they are not going to be cured and could scare them, as it did me even though I have survived; it is not a book to read during treatment. It is very interesting; cervical cancer has not had as much coverage as breast cancer or prostate cancer, perhaps because the site of the cancer is not easy to talk about.

I had to go use the glossary to understand some of the technical words, but once I had read the meaning, it was easier to understand the book. It is not something that I would really read, or go for by visual appearance, but it is good quality, a good size and easy to fit into a handbag; I read it on the train and the removable cover meant that it wasn't so easy for people to see what I was reading.

This book offers a great insight into where and how cervical cancer was first detected, and I recommend it to anyone in the medical profession. I knew only what I was told and not many people spoke about it due to the stigma. I now have a better understanding of what happened to me and how cervical cancer affects people in different ways. It will certainly help survivors, patients or carers learn about the background of cervical cancer; this should not be ignored or hidden from the people that need to know. I did not like the chapter that points to the fact that cervical cancer may be caused by having too many sexual partners. I have never had a STD, HPV or a lot of partners. I was disheartened by the fact that this is the cause for most women.

#### **Cervical cancer patient (36-45) (December 2012)**

This is a well-researched, trustworthy reference on the social and medical history of cervical cancer. It demonstrates that medicine and society are getting on top of this cancer. It makes useful comparisons between 21st century prevention in the West and women in developing countries, and clearly establishes a link between poverty and cervical cancer. It shows scientifically the value of early detection, cancer education, PAPS (regular), other forms of screening and vaccinations. For those living with or after cervical cancer, it offers information and hope as well as greater trust in the medical and gynaecological community. But it offers no comfort to those with advanced cancer. For carers, it is a reference source but nothing else. It is very useful for medical professionals, public health officials and ministers, as well as WHO, UNCIEF and policy makers all over the world.

The author is organised and logical. Technical words are explained and the glossary is very good, but only educated people will find the text easy to understand. In general, her audience is women, but only medical professionals, policy makers, or pressure groups would willingly cope with the length and language. This is a pity because it offers hope. The paper and layout are good but photographs of smears, abnormalities, and lesions would be useful. The cover is misleading – it almost looks like a website for alternative medicine. The tone is caring, professional and scientific. However, the author rarely reaches out to patients. It is an implicit appeal to health professionals and does not have the language to communicate to lay people. There are too few contemporary case studies showing a woman's journey through the disease.

This book is a reliable source of information, providing an honest account of the battle to conquer this disease. It is a source of hope, instilling greater trust in the medical profession. It is conscientiously researched, but most patients will not have the energy to read it. Having said that, it provides them with all they need to know about cervical cancer. It equips any woman to demand appropriate screening and treatment, instils trust in the medical community and the progress of medicine. It ultimately puts responsibility for prevention in women's hands. Ideally, it should be rewritten in a maximum of 50-100 pages.

### **Ovarian and womb cancer patient (56-65) (November 2012)**

This is an interesting, informative and thought-provoking read after treatment but I would have found it a difficult read during treatment, particularly the graphic descriptions in the first chapters. The last chapters (4-6) and epilogue should be read by mothers of teenage girls to understand the risk of cervical cancer and HPV. I wish I'd read these sections when I was in my teens; I would have been more aware, taken better care of my gynaecological health and perhaps been diagnosed earlier.

The author has a pleasant and friendly tone but the flow of the text is disrupted by many dates and the language won't be accessible to everyone. Although there is a good glossary, there are a lot of medical terms that I was only familiar with due to my first-hand experience. As a recent patient, I found some of the graphic descriptions of treatments and symptoms quite difficult to read. Chapters 1-3 made me very glad I was treated in the 21st century not the 18th! However, the author describes the medical advances throughout history very thoroughly and informatively.

This is a very interesting read about a subject that does not get nearly as much attention or publicity as it should. However, the language is quite academic I would recommend it only to those who I know are educated enough to cope with the language, and not to a patient having treatment.

### **Recently recovered from treatment for cervical cancer (26-35) (June 2012)**

This book would help new medical professionals to learn about what their patients could be going through and to help them understand how the treatment of cervical cancer has progressed, and how in other ways we are still very much in the dark.

I found it quite easy to understand, but I have a medical background. The language and information at the start are more appropriate for health care professionals and others would find it overwhelming. It may put them off and an audience could be lost. The notes at the end are invaluable for readers who may not understand everything. Some of these notes include links to video clips.

It is not too thick to be off putting and the chapters are in bite-size portions, helpful for those who find the text difficult to absorb. The font could be larger. The cover is off putting; it does not demonstrate what the book is about, and took me several minutes to realise that the image is of a woman's hip, I'm still not sure. Although I did not expect it to have a speculum on the cover, it could have been warmer to the eye. The title also comes across as quite dramatic and cold, the word woman is smaller than the word disease; it feels as aggressive as the cancer itself. I also found the authors' attitude at the beginning of the book quite bitter about the funding of breast cancer research; having just lost someone to breast cancer, this was quite painful.

I like the depth of the notes, and feel that this book would be a great asset to student nurses as a reference tool, to teach them complex relationships, history, science, and society's attitude to the female form. The bite size facts in the text will stick in the minds of young students and stay with them during their career. I found it insightful and full of facts that stay with you after you have closed the book and put it aside.

### **Former health care professional and family member of cancer patients (26-35) (February 2012)**

This is more of a historical reference book. It is relatively easy to understand and will be useful for anyone interested in cervical cancer generally; it is technical in parts. In the chapter on 21st century treatment there is no mention of chemotherapy and not much on current radiotherapy and brachytherapy techniques and survivorship statistics. This is disappointing. Some relevant photos would be helpful.

I will certainly recommend it to other health professionals. For patients, it will depend on their ability to process this type of data. I enjoyed the breadth of the book but I don't know if most patients would find it helpful. I suggest it is more targeted at specialists, for example epidemiologists or people working in health promotion.

### **Health care professional living with cervical cancer (36-45) (January 2012)**



This book is very comprehensive but quite hard to read (possibly because translated or written by someone who does not speak English as their first language?). It has a lot of historical information, but this could be worrying if read at the wrong time.

The language is quite clear and there is a glossary, extensive notes and reading list. I am not sure who the intended audience is, perhaps people who study the history of medicine? The cover design and overall quality is good, although it is quite heavy because it is a hardback. The layout is 'dense' i.e. a small typeface, with no diagrams or pictures. There is also quite a lot of repetition.

I like the in-depth research and knowledge that has gone into this book. It might be useful to me if I was to update my own publications on cervical cancer but as a cervical cancer patient I am not sure if I would wish to read the whole book.

It will be useful for researchers, and I would recommend it to medical practitioners. People newly diagnosed or still being treated might find it hard to read. It all depends on their preferences and background.

**Former cervical cancer patient (56-65) (December 2011)**



This book is purely a history of the disease and no use to a cancer patient or their family or friends. It might be of interest to a medical professional, but I doubt that they need to know this much; it's mostly facts about the past and present, more an account of what's happened, what's happening now and a few theories as to why.

It is easy to look up most of the words and the author elaborates most points quite well, with good relevant examples to the points being made, however there was nothing of use for me apart from perhaps at the beginning about the three patients in history. I don't think patients could draw much from it.

**Cervical cancer patient (36-45) (January 2013)**

# Further information

## Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

## Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

## Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

**Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.**

**It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.**

**We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to live life as fully as you can. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

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