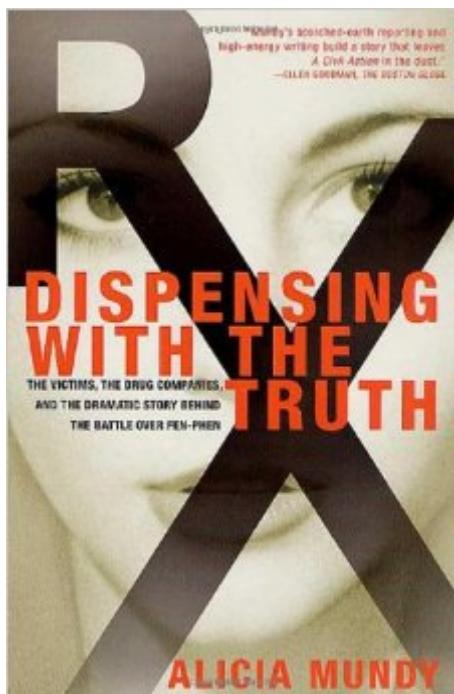


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Dispensing With The Truth: The Victims, The Drug Companies, And The Dramatic Story Behind The Battle Over Fen-Phen



Synopsis

Semi-finalist for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book AwardIn 1996, a terrible epidemic began killing young American women. Some died quickly, literally dropping in their steps. Others took more time, from a few months to a few years. Those who weren't killed suffered damage to their lungs and hearts, much of it permanent and reparable only with major surgery. Doctors suspected what the killer was. So did the Food and Drug Administration. The culprits were the two most popular diet drugs in the United States, Pondimin, one-half of the popular drug combination Fen-Phen, and Redux, a stronger version of Pondimin. They were also two of the most profitable drugs on the market, and both were produced and sold by a powerful pharmaceutical company, Wyeth-Ayerst, a division of American Home Products. Dispensing the Truth is the gripping story of what the drug really knew about its drugs, the ways it kept this information from the public, doctors, and FDA, and the massive legal battles that ensued as victims and their attorneys searched for the truth behind the debacle. It tells the story of a healthy young woman, Mary Linnen, who took the drugs for only twenty-three days to lose weight before her wedding, and then died in the arms of her fiance a few months later. Hers was the first wrongful-death suit filed and would become the most important single suit the company would ever face. Alicia Mundy provides a shocking and thoroughly riveting narrative. It is a stark look at the consequences of greed and a cautionary tale for the future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a good read, especially in the beginning, but if you want to go beyond the courtroom drama and the legal aspects of the case, you have to read carefully. (Taking notes wouldn't hurt.) This is a

complex story, and one has to admire Alicia Mundy's skill in managing it while spinning out an engaging narrative. She succeeds by concentrating on one case, that of 29-year-old Mary Linnen, an Orchard Park, New York woman, who developed primary pulmonary hypertension (PPH) after using the Fen-Phen drug combination for a mere 23 days. There is no cure for PPH, and the treatments amount to something like sustained torture. Tragically, less than a year after diagnosis, Mary Linnen was dead. Within her story, Mundy focuses on two main characters. One is the engaging and colorful Alex MacDonald, the lead attorney representing Mary Linnen's estate, who along with many others sued American Home Products, the parent company of Wyeth-Ayerst, the distributors of Pondimin and Redux (one half of the deadly Fen-Phen diet cocktail), for wrongful death; and the other is Leo Lutwak, a well-meaning but ineffectual administrator at the Food and Drug Administration. But I think the real story here is the corporate mentality inside the drug companies that led to the tragedy, and the incompetence at the FDA that allowed it. Although I think Mundy concentrates too much on the lawyers in her narrative (she indicates in the "Acknowledgments" that she was inspired by Jonathan Harr's lawyer-centered *A Civil Action*), she is still able to give a complete story, but it takes some real effort on the part of the reader to get it all.

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