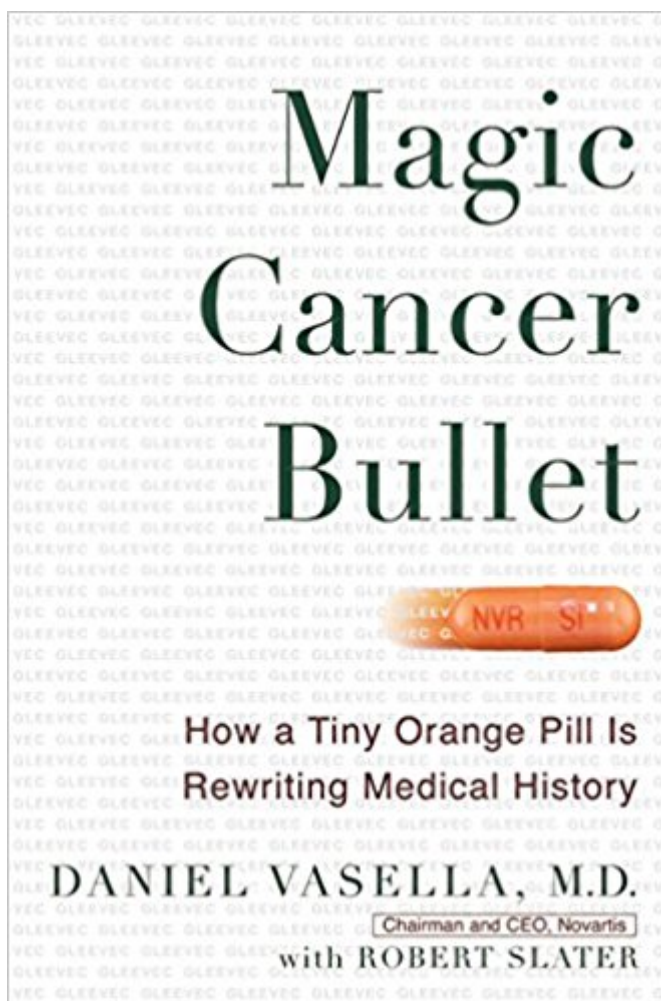


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Magic Cancer Bullet: How A Tiny Orange Pill May Rewrite Medical History



Synopsis

The remarkable story behind the revolutionary miracle cure for cancer, Gleevec. Novartis chairman Dr Dan Vasella describes its development and how he and Novartis orchestrated the breakthrough approval and massive production of this amazing drug. Pharmaceutical giant Novartis recently developed Gleevec, one of the first 'smart' drugs created to kill cancer cells without damaging healthy cells in the process. In early tests with a common form of leukemia and other types of cancer, Gleevec has been extraordinarily successful, and side effects have been astoundingly minimal. Gleevec communicates directly with cancer-causing chromosomes and interrupts the signal that causes excessive growth of certain white blood cells. Patients have seen their tumours shrink significantly, and some have disappeared altogether. This is the inside story of the creation of this miracle drug, and how Novartis CEO and chairman Dan Vasella rallied the company to bring Gleevec to market in mass quantities and record time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Gleevec is one of the few cancer drugs hailed as a breakthrough that, so far, has largely lived up to its hype. Vasella, the CEO and chairman of pharmaceutical giant Novartis (which manufactures Gleevec), and Slater (Jack Welch & the GE Way) outline the development, remarkably successful clinical trials and accelerated production and approval process that led to the drug's speedy entry onto the market for the treatment of a rare cancer known as chronic myeloid leukemia (CML).

Although the story's components-devoted scientists, risk-taking executives and activist patients-lend

themselves to a gripping insider narrative, the book lacks the details and depth of feeling needed to make that story come alive. Repetition and stilted writing slow the account down further. As a result, the book reads largely as an extended press release for Novartis. Things begin to pick up toward the end, particularly when Vasella defends the high cost of the drug and discusses the challenge of managing patient, media and investor expectations. Gleevec may indeed represent a new direction for cancer research, but the excitement that fact should generate is not captured here. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“Compelling...Vasella reveals the innovative strategies that rushed this orange capsule to desperate patients in record time...a heroic saga.” (Fortune)

Loved this book - it read like a suspense novel and brought tears to my eyes. Yes it is written from the eyes of big pharma and yes, it is not a cure for all Cancer but it is a dramatic breakthrough and a functional cure for those suffering from a certain type of Leukemia. There are so many lessons to be learned here - the risks and the costs of bringing a drug to market and the many ways that it can never happen - even for ultimately successful drugs like Gleevec. Other readers have rightfully criticized the fact that Gleevec costs \$7,000 per month - even more expensive than when it first came on the market in 2001. The medical community has said that there is no basis for this cost and it certainly reeks of price gauging - and this for a drug that you need to take everyday...forever.

What appeared to be a good story on an amazing cancer drug discovery turns out to be a disappointment in reading experience. There is no doubt that the author is intelligent; (given that he did find this amazing drug and remains to be a CEO of a huge pharmaceutical company) but someone should have helped him out with his writing. There were run on sentences, misspelled words and the flow of his writing doesn't get the reader excited. Instead, it conveys a sense of sensationalism and unnecessary drama.

Book like new. Contained great info on new treatment for my Luekemia CML.

While this was a very interesting "inside view" of the pharmaceutical industry, the author (or ghost writer?) tries too hard to sound humanitarian, and ends up sounding rather fake (or as if he were going for a medical school interview). A lot of the book ends up being a justification of the marketing and sales of the drug, and ends up sounding heavy-handed. Also, the reader must be aware that

this book does not tell the entire story of Gleevec - just search for it on the NY Times, and the patients will tell you the darker side of the tale. In the end, this book is just another marketing scheme for this niche drug, and should be treated as such.

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The book title "Cancer's Magic Bullet" is an inaccurate statement so typical of Big Pharma. Does Gleevec work for patients with CML - yes, but there are only about 5,000 new CML patients diagnosed each year with CML versus 10-12,000,000 cancer sufferers overall. Gleevec may be CML's "Magic Bullet", but has no effect on more than 100 other cancers especially solid tumors. How Novartis is cheating all of us - Cancer researchers George Miklos and Phillip Baird masterfully articulate the delusional problem infecting the science of cancer research by showing that cancer researchers, including Novartis, are close to having the worst record for investigational drugs in clinical development. Brian Druker, chair of Leukemia research and professor of medicine at the Oregon Health and Science University Cancer Institute was the key researcher behind the discovery of Gleevec, not Novartis. Druker states, "My work in Oregon on a therapy for CML was primarily funded by public sources, particularly the National Cancer Institute...The approval of Gleevec by the FDA in May 2001 for use in CML was the culmination of a 10-year project for me, something I had dreamed of since medical school." Meanwhile, the price tag for front-line cancer therapy has become obscene. In an essay Druker chastises Novartis for causing him "considerable discomfort" at the price at which Gleevec has been offered for sale by Novartis around the world. This goes against the spirit of the patent system and is not justified given the vital investments made by the public sector over decades that make the discovery of these medicines possible. The Gleevec story should be seen in its proper clinical perspective. There is little point in singing the praises of Gleevec and pretending that it is a proof of principle for solid tumors or some kind of overall "Cancer Magic Bullet" since its use is limited to less than 1% of cancer patients.

This book is both useful--as an insider's description of how drug development works--and entertaining, as a story of a decidedly unusual case. Gleevec is still in use and seems to be an important part of the drug toolkit, despite the discovery of some side effects. In addition, its discovery does appear to be historic because it was an early example of compounds targeted at

particular genetic processes. Dr. Vasella, of course, had personal and corporate reasons for telling this story: he wanted to demonstrate that the company is "people who care" and he wanted to justify the patenting and pricing of pharma drugs. But he is very explicit about these goals and they don't detract from the interesting history. I found the style quite readable, although some undefined terms sent me to the Internet and the chronology could have been ordered a bit better.

Never will read this book because useless information, I have CML. Wonder how a CEO would write a book regarding to Gleevec when all the info is online. The company he worked for is making billions of dollars on this medicine. I know for a fact a 1 mo supply cost over 6-9k a mo. It not a cure, it's a lifetime medication.....I feel for those who don't qualify to get this med free or very low cost. This medicine has to be monitor with blood test for make sure med doing its job. Any responsible oncologist/hematologist knows this. Average appointment is 3-6 mo. So I am wonder if the one person is being honest about not being monitor. Too little or too much can be harmful

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