suffer some from of dementia as a result of their surgery) to cancer screening, where much of the screening and scanning for disease causes immeasurable anxiety in the population, yet delivers little demonstrable health benefit.

Brownlee, a crack American health journalist, who has written for *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New York Times Magazine*, has produced a compelling and damning indictment of the way health care is organized and delivered in the richest country in the world. If Michael Moore's recent film *Sicko* exposed viewers to the excruciating dilemmas faced by people who can't access ingenious American medicine (CMAJ 2007;177:379-80), *Overtreated* provides us the flip side, with compelling stories of people who are injured or die because they get too much of a good thing.

Readers will find some territory in this book previously covered by others. Her chapter on the pharmaceutical industry ("Money, Drugs and Lies") covers similar ground as Jerry Avorn's excellent *Powerful Medicine* and Marcia Angell's *The Truth About the Drug Companies*. The overabundance of unnecessary care has been tackled by Norman Temple and Andrew Thompson's *Excessive Medical Spending* and Arndt Von Hippel's *Better Health Care At Half The Cost*.

Nevertheless, Canadian health policy-makers could learn a lot from this book. If anything it could help them become better advocates for research and practices that can protect patients from the enthusiastic excesses of a medical system that embraces an unthinking "more-is-better" philosophy. Canadian physicians too will find a lot to ponder in this book, because, whether it's a role they like or not, they are the gatekeepers to our health care and most decisions on who passes through those gates are determined by the collective and individual actions of our physicians.

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Poem

Letter to Leo

How many restaurants, how many times?
Always the language of Sisyphus: grunt
and groan. I asked you of the cancer
that claimed you, that you couldn't pronounce:
irony, the big, crushing stone.
And the lowest point in you:
I was taught that there is no place in the human body
an 18-gauge needle cannot go.
Love is such a place.
I loved you, Leo,
like a Tom Waits valentine.
I met with you to discuss counts,
to discuss the ways of doctors
(which are: lift up the stone, then hide underneath)
and to cuff hope.

And with each tainted trapping,
the oxygen container,
the wheely scooter,
I realized that you would die,
counts down,
a stone dropped into a pool,
a mouthful of hamburger helper
at a greasy spoon,
goodbye the last stone.
I push it still.

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