To Get Smarter About Breast Cancer, Read “Radical”

When a health reporter got breast cancer, she investigated why women aren’t getting the best treatment in the United States.

October 9, 2019 By Casey Halter

Want to look beyond the media hype and truly understand breast cancer? A new book on the the disease in the United States just scored a rave review from The New York Times, which called it “an evenhanded, powerful and unflinching page-turner.”

The book is Radical: The Science, Culture and History of Breast Cancer in America, and it’s written by Kate Pickert, a journalism professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and a former health reporter for Time. It is both a cultural and scientific deep dive into breast cancer, anchored by the writer’s own experience with the disease. Pickert was diagnosed with triple-positive breast cancer in 2014 at age 35. She underwent more than a year of treatment, including chemotherapy, a double mastectomy, the removal of 22 lymph nodes, radiation and targeted therapy.

The book is decidedly not a simple story of victory, hope or emotional triumph. Instead, it reveals how doctors, pharmaceutical companies and sometimes advocacy groups have manipulated the emotional nature of breast cancer to prevent patients from making informed decisions about testing and treatment.

Pickert also speaks out against “pink ribbon advocacy,” unnecessary mammograms and the history of disfigurement that breast cancer patients have faced (often despite the availability of less destructive surgery) at the hands of surgeons for decades.

“In a perfect world, all patients would have the information they need to make informed choices,” writes reviewer Pauline Chen in her review. “In such a world, the virtuoso violinist with colon cancer could avoid a chemotherapy regimen that renders fingers insensate; the newly married man with prostate cancer could forgo surgery that might affect his erectile function; and the triathlete with breast cancer could decline chemotherapy that might result in heart failure.”

But that world, as revealed by Radical, is not this world. Today, more than 3 million Americans have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Through history, science and personal experience, this book argues that treatment ought to do better by them.

To learn more about mammography and diagnosis, click here.

To learn more about breast cancer treatment options, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.