



In the Kingdom of the Sick: A Social History of Chronic Illness in America

Laurie Edwards

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Thirty years ago, Susan Sontag wrote, "Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick ... Sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place." Now more than 133 million Americans live with chronic illness, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all health care dollars, and untold pain and disability.

There has been an alarming rise in illnesses that defy diagnosis through clinical tests or have no known cure. Millions of people, especially women, with illnesses such as irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue syndrome face skepticism from physicians and the public alike. And people with diseases as varied as cardiovascular disease, HIV, certain cancers, and type 2 diabetes have been accused of causing their preventable illnesses through their lifestyle choices.

We must balance our faith in medical technology with awareness of the limits of science, and confront our throwback beliefs that people who are sick have weaker character than those who are well. Through research and patient narratives, health writer Laurie Edwards explores patient rights, the role of social media in medical advocacy, the origins of our attitudes about chronic illness, and much more. What *The Noonday Demon* did for people suffering from depression, *In the Kingdom of the Sick* does for those who are chronically ill.

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