

## Side Effects

Shannon was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in January and her doctor immediately started her on a drug regimen to combat the disease. In early April, two months into her treatment, she felt worse than ever. Each day she sank deeper into exhaustion. In a routine checkup, the neurologist ran blood tests to rule out any unknown problems.

As she weakened daily, Shannon assumed that her grueling exhaustion was due to her MS, and that she must simply find a way to endure. At the end of May this very dispirited woman went to see her neurologist for another regularly scheduled checkup. The doctor's staff drew blood again.

The next day she got a frightening call from the doctor's office telling her to come in right away. When she arrived the doctor explained that her blood test results from six weeks earlier showed dangerously low levels of three crucial parts of her blood -- red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. The count was so low that it constituted a medical emergency, but due to a mix-up no one had told Shannon about those test results before this visit.

That was bad news. The worse news was that the previous day's tests indicated an even further drop in her blood count. Her doctor was extremely concerned and wanted to hospitalize Shannon right away.

How had Shannon arrived at such a point? Why was she in such danger? The drop in her blood count was a direct side effect of one of the drugs prescribed for her in January. Shannon was at risk of dying -- and had endured months of physical and emotional torment -- because of a drug intended to help her.

She recovered, but not everyone is so fortunate. If Shannon had understood the potential side effects, it could have saved her twelve weeks of misery and risk.

Adapted from *Killer Cure*  
by Elizabeth L. Bewley

# 4 Questions

## To Ask Your Doctor About Any Treatment



## Safe and Effective?

*Not Always*

One dirty little secret of modern medicine is that many drugs work only in a minority of people.

- J. Carey, "Do Cholesterol Drugs Do Any Good?" *Business Week*, 17 Jan 2008.

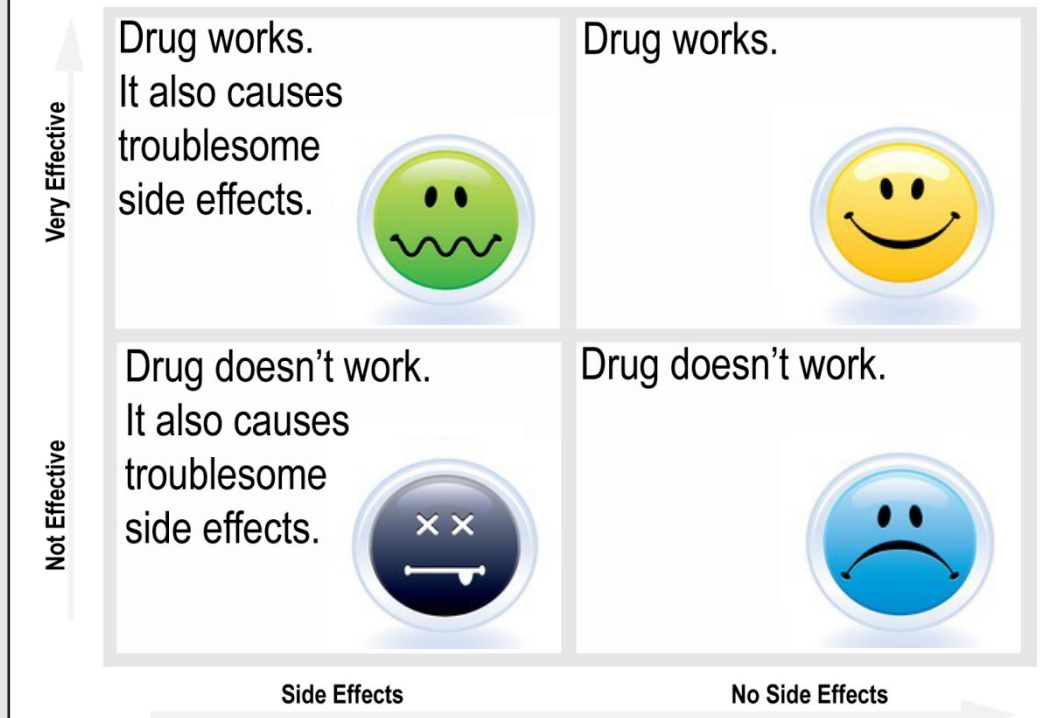
One study concluded that '[medical] drug related problems accounted for 116 million extra visits to the doctor per year, 76 million additional prescriptions, 17 million emergency department visits, 8 million admissions to [the] hospital, 3 million admissions to long term care facilities, and 199,000 additional deaths.'

- S. Weingart, R. McL. Wilson, R. W. Gibbard, B. Harrison, "Epidemiology of Medical Error" *BMJ*, 18 Mar 2000.

Any symptom in an elderly patient should be considered a drug side effect until proved otherwise.

- J. Gurwitz, M. Monane, S. Monane J. Avorn, "Long-Term Care Quality Letter," Brown University 1995.

## When an Individual is Treated



Sometimes drugs work as intended; sometimes they don't.  
Sometimes they produce troublesome side effects; sometimes they don't.  
Different people might experience the same drug differently.

### Watch the Video

Go to [www.killercure.net](http://www.killercure.net), click on "Videos," and select "Four Square."

### Read More

See *Killer Cure* by Elizabeth L. Bewley.

## Prescription Drug Checklist

My name	
Date	
Brand name of drug	
Generic name of drug	
Strength	
When to take	
How much to take	
How long to continue	
Other instructions	
1 <b>What is this drug intended to do?</b>	
2 <b>How will we know if it's working for me?</b>	
3 <b>When will we know if it's working for me?</b>	
4 <b>What big problems should I be watching out for, and what do I do if they happen?</b>	

Use this checklist when your doctor writes you a prescription.  
Carefully follow the instructions.  
Report back if it is not working or if it produces troublesome side effects.