The book “Silicone on Trial: Breast Implants and Politics of Risk” has all the ingredients of a non-fiction suspense novel. Unfortunately, the characters were real people, and this bizarre storyline played out in real life, making an impact on the lives and careers of many and continuing to haunt the industry. Dr Jack Fisher did a tremendous amount of research and preparation in the compilation of this book. It is a very well-organized and fair description of the events surrounding the silicone crisis. While it does tell an interesting story, it is really a historical book that covers the intertwining legal, political, corporate, scientific, medical, and public components surrounding silicone implants.

The initial focus of the story is on the establishment of stricter regulatory processes and government oversight organizations, where Dr Fisher draws analogies to the seizure of Coca Cola barrels in 1909 over concerns of ingredients and safety. This set the stage for the importance of stricter regulations of various products in the United States, with obvious ramifications in the medical field for devices and drugs. This is followed in the book by a detailed account of the importance of organosilicone polymers in the war and post-war era, and how they became used in household products and eventually, with indications in medicine expanding, came to be inserted into humans as catheters, joints, and subsequently breasts, to name just a few.

The initial excitement in the 1960s, with Timmie Jean Lindsay receiving the first breast implant in March of 1962 in Houston, must have been electric. This paralleled the growth of Hugh Heffner’s career and America’s preoccupation with breast size, and created a new market for something that was previously not considered changeable. Surgeons were intrigued to learn the techniques, companies were eager to grow product lines, and patients were swarming to meet their desires. This “perfect storm” for a growing industry was merely the calm before the real storm, which was yet to come. Risks such as capsular contracture started to emerge in the 1970s but were overshadowed at the time by patient satisfaction. Recognition of the risks eventually turned into concerns and then fear, and what happened after that was just the perfect combination of public fear, media frenzy, unsuspecting patients, plastic surgeons, consumer advocacy groups, and plaintiff attorneys.

The last and most exciting part of the book addresses how this whole crisis unfolded. Ailments were both real and imagined; however, hostility towards the corporations and involved parties were real. Women were angry about the perception of incomplete disclosure to the Food and Drug Administration, fueled by attorneys and advocacy groups instigating a public overreaction to unsubstantiated fears. Medical, legal, and political decisions were often being made based on dubious science and information from the courtrooms rather than clinics or laboratories. Who would have thought that the 4% of less-than-satisfied patients and chance coincidental occurrences could create such a tidal wave? It became a litigation circus, and many of the moves played perfectly into the hands of trial lawyers. By the time these alleged risks had been disproven, it was too late.

Dr Losken is Program Director and Professor of Surgery in the Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

Corresponding Author:
Dr Albert Losken, Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, Emory University, 550 Peachtree Street, Suite 9000, Atlanta, GA 30308, USA.
E-mail: alosken@emory.edu
Billions of dollars had been paid, patients and physicians likely overreacted to these perceived fears, and silicone breast implants received a reputation and notoriety that has yet to fully recover. I still have patients every week question the safety of silicone breast implants based on what happened in the 1990s.

Although I was not practicing plastic surgery at the time of the silicone crisis unfolded, my practice today is different because of it. While the regulatory processing is more regimented now than it has ever been, we as an organization are overly conscientious about understanding risks and documenting safety, which improves our ability to provide full disclosure to the patient prior to embarking on anything new, especially if it is a game-changer. Dr Fisher is to be congratulated on his elegant and concise account of what surrounded the silicone implant crisis. The book is non-biased, well written, and, although full of detail and facts, it relatively easy to read. The facts and timelines are easy to follow in sections throughout the book and they are nicely summarized in a Chronology section in the end. This book is especially a good read for younger plastic surgeons, who are practicing in the aftermath of the silicone implant crises and might not completely have understood all the intricacies surrounding the events that unfolded: they should be forewarned to do all they can not to make the same mistakes again.

**RATING: 4.5 OF 5**


**Disclosures**

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.