



The American Health Care Paradox: Why Spending More is Getting Us Less

By Elizabeth H. Bradley, Lauren A. Taylor

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Foreword by Harvey V. Fineberg, President of the Institute of Medicine

For decades, experts have puzzled over why the US spends more on health care but suffers poorer outcomes than other industrialized nations. Now Elizabeth H. Bradley and Lauren A. Taylor marshal extensive research, including a comparative study of health care data from thirty countries, and get to the root of this paradox: We've left out of our tally the most impactful expenditures countries make to improve the health of their populations—investments in social services.

In *The American Health Care Paradox*, Bradley and Taylor illuminate how narrow definitions of “health care,” archaic divisions in the distribution of health and social services, and our allergy to government programs combine to create needless suffering in individual lives, even as health care spending continues to soar. They show us how and why the US health care “system” developed as it did; examine the constraints on, and possibilities for, reform; and profile inspiring new initiatives from around the world.

Offering a unique and clarifying perspective on the problems the Affordable Care Act won't solve, this book also points a new way forward.

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Editorial Review

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Public-health experts Bradley and Taylor argue that, despite numerous and widespread efforts to rein in health-care costs, America is still paying more and getting less when the overall health of the country is contrasted with those of its international peers, even accounting for differences in national policy. The authors' iteration of the fundamental cause of the system's root paradox—it rewards a person who waits until they're so sick they require expensive care while at the same time shaming the expensive-care provider for, well, charging for the expensive care—is not new. What is new here is their call for a holistic approach, integrating social and medical services into a cohesive cross-disciplinary system with the goal of supporting good health. Health-care systems fail because they don't address the life circumstances (education, housing, employment) required to sustain wellness. To be clear, the authors don't endorse a nanny state that becomes all things to all people but, rather, a government that is a catalyst for holistic innovation, nurturing good health at all socioeconomic levels. --Donna Chavez

Review

"*The American Health Care Paradox*" has enough intellectual heft to bring an opera house to its feet. Drawing on data from dozens of international and domestic site visits, wide-ranging scholarly studies and in-depth interviews with patients, practitioners, health care administrators and social service staff from all over the world, the authors tackle the unenviable task of explaining why we think of health care the way we do—to the near total exclusion of social services. And they manage to do it with astonishing clarity, conciseness and narrative ease."—**Pauline Chen, the *New York Times***

"An important attempt to shift the discussion on health in the United States"—***Kirkus***

"Their argument has intuitive appeal...[and] is made more attractive by their clear prose and by their many helpful descriptions and historical explanations of US health care policy."—**Arnold Relman, *New York Review of Books***

"Admirably presented as an apolitical examination of an urgent situation, Bradley and Taylor's carefully researched and lucidly reported findings...offer what appears to be an easily rendered fix, but their equally striking depiction of uniquely American hostility to government involvement in private matters, exposes a daunting uphill battle." —***Publishers Weekly***

"Bradley and Taylor have identified social services as the unnamed culprit behind high health care costs and poor outcomes. Highlighting the non-medical determinants of patients' health may not only make physicians' jobs easier but also prove to be a prudent strategy for payers. This book offers an important reality check about what actually creates health in the United States."

—**William Gillespie, MD, Chief Medical Officer of Emblem Health, and president of AdvantageCare Physicians**

"It seems like there are daily stories of skyrocketing medical costs here in the US coupled with our bad health outcomes compared with other developed countries. This book argues compellingly that we may have been looking for solutions in the wrong places. We won't find the answers by changing medical payments or

improving quality of care as important, as those are. But rather that health begins, is nurtured, protected and preserved in our families and neighborhoods—where people live, learn, work and play. The authors find that supporting families and children in ways that make their houses, neighborhoods and schools secure and enjoyable pays off in health in concrete and measurable ways. It is time we started to get serious about building a culture of health and making it easier for people to live that kind of life than merely paying the costs to repair the damages from injury and disease." —**James S. Marks, MD, MPH, president and director of Health Group at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

"If we're so rich, why aren't we healthier? I'd wondered about that for years, always assuming it was a medical question with a medical answer. I now know the answer lies not in what happens in our hospitals but what happens (or fails to happen) in our social services. This compelling, groundbreaking, and utterly persuasive book has opened my eyes." —**Anne Fadiman, author of *The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down***

"This book provides new insight on why it is the United States' is spending so much on medicine without seeing commensurate health outcomes. Bradley and Taylor provide a clear account of life in the chasm between health and social services, where so much of our health care investment is lost, and put forth concrete ideas on how we can do better."

—**Dr. Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, Harvard Medical School, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Partners In Health, and author of *To Repair the World and Haiti After the Earthquake***

About the Author

Elizabeth H. Bradley is professor of public health at Yale University, faculty director of its Global Health Leadership Institute, and master at Branford College. The recipient of a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant, she was previously director of the health management program and co-director of the Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program at Yale and served as hospital administrator at Massachusetts General Hospital. She lives in New Haven, Connecticut.

Lauren A. Taylor studies public health and medical ethics at Harvard Divinity School, where she is a presidential scholar. She was formerly a program manager at the Yale Global Health Leadership Institute, where she led a research team in building a model for scaling up public health innovations for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She completed a master's in public health at Yale University in 2009. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

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