

Book: *Saving Lives and Saving Money: Transforming Health And Healthcare*

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Book Review

This book is a straightforward yet thought-provoking read examining both the flaws in our nation's delivery system and solutions-drawn from real world successes-that taken together can transform it into a more efficient, patient centered, outcomes based approach. Despite the principal author's politically partisan history, the book is surprisingly objective and equally critical of politicians on both sides of the aisle.

The book is divided into 10 easy-to-read chapters:

1. Why the Best of the Past is Not Good Enough for the Future
2. Why Reforming Healthcare is Doomed to Fail and Only a Process of Transforming Health and Healthcare Can Succeed
3. The Principles of a 21st Century System of Health and Healthcare
4. Health First, Healthcare Second
5. Personal Control of Healthcare Dollars
6. Medical Culture
7. Toward a 21st Century System of Health Justice
8. Diabetes as an Example of the Health First, Healthcare Second Model in *Saving Lives & Saving Money*
9. For the Big Breakthroughs in Health: Invest in Science and Discovery
10. Active, Healthy Aging: Living Healthier, Happier, and Longer

The three appendices are very useful. Appendix A, Transforming Examples, provides examples of 21 organizations that have implemented new ideas along the lines of the ideas in the book. Names and phone numbers for contacting the organizations is included. Appendix B, Biothreat: Transform or Risk Mass Deaths, covers the infrastructure challenges we face in combating a bioterror threat on any scale. It is a good discussion, but falls short of new recommendations. Appendix C, Web Site References, lists web sites for both public and private organizations for the reader's further study.

Chapters 1 and 2 briefly examine the root causes of inefficiencies in the current system (physician training, the third party payment system, Medicare's lack of a preventive approach, the impact of trial lawyers, etc). The authors also explain why reforms addressing elements of the system will not solve the overall problems. Chapters 3-10 expand on the thesis that patients must be active consumers in their own well-being and explains the roles of providers, government, insurers, and employers. In addition to the moral reasons for change, the authors discuss the impact of health on the nation's future productivity as the labor pool shrinks and the inability of the current federal programs to provide – or afford – adequate care in the coming years.

Readers may be surprised at chapter 9, where the authors advocate increased spending for the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Science Foundation, and NASA. With medical breakthroughs and broader scientific knowledge a centerpiece of the authors' vision, they argue that these agencies are well positioned to fill this role, citing their track records in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, both direct and indirect.

This book could easily have become a health care reform "wish list", but the authors keep the discussion well-grounded in reality with discussion of topics such as lost opportunities in diabetes prevention and the need for an electronic medical records system nation-wide. Information technology advancements and widespread utilization is key to the authors' transformation vision. The IT requirements are far more evolutionary than revolutionary and helps justify the book's optimistic tone. With HHS's recent appointment of a health information "Czar" to move the latter forward over the next 10 years, the transformation described in the book seem very do-able.

The chapters and appendices are very stand-alone, so the reader can read the book straight through, or in any order that interests them. The case studies are applicable to numerous health care settings and can be appreciated by healthcare leaders of every discipline. This book is a good read for both administrators and medical staff leadership.