



The Health Care Handbook: A Clear and Concise Guide to the United States Health Care System

Elisabeth Askin, Nathan Moore, Vikram Shankar, William A. Peck (Foreword by)

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The 2nd edition of the best-selling practical, neutral, and readable overview of the US health care system is now available. This updated edition of the Health Care Handbook covers:

- New sections on health IT, team-based care and health care quality
- A clear summary of health policy and the Affordable Care Act
- Inpatient & outpatient health care and delivery systems
- Health insurance and the factors that make health care so expensive
- Concise summaries of 32 different health professions
- Medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and the research world
- And much, much more

The Handbook is the one-stop guide to the people, organizations and industries that make up the U.S. health care system and major issues the system faces today. It is rigorously researched and scrupulously unbiased yet written in a conversational and humorous tone that's a pleasure to read and illuminates the convoluted health care system and its many components. The Handbook is now used by hundreds of academic programs and health care companies.

Each section of the book includes an introduction to the key facts and foundations that make the health care system work along with balanced analyses of the major challenges and controversies within health care, including medical errors, government regulation, medical malpractice, and much more. Suggested readings are included for readers who wish to learn more about specific topics.

The Health Care Handbook: A Clear and Concise Guide to the United States Health Care System Details

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From Reader Review The Health Care Handbook: A Clear and Concise Guide to the United States Health Care System for online ebook

Alla says

Very informative if you want to get an overview of the U.S. health care system. Goes over new health care law and other health care issues (e.g. insurance, payments, etc.)

Jennifer says

I am so pleased by this book. Everything confusing about the health care system is explained in plain language, and it doesn't make any assumptions about things you may or may not know (i.e. a nutritionist vs. a dietician, what CNS stands for, etc.). The only thing that kind of sucked was that I had to read it on a Kindle.

Maria says

I read this after starting a new job in health insurance (switching from a completely different field); it eased some of my confusion and helped me ask better questions. It is what it says on the tin: Clear and concise.

There is no narrative, but if you're already motivated to ingest the information the authors make it possible to do so efficiently and more or less painlessly. In places it suffers from failure of imagination when discussing the costs/benefits of particular policies or potential alternatives, and such discussions are always minimal. So this won't help you be a better armchair policy wonk or political arguer, except inasmuch as it will prevent you from getting your facts embarrassingly wrong.

Recommended for anyone who woke up one day surprised to find themselves embedded in this mess.

John Doyle says

A clearly written survey of the structure of the US healthcare system, including the impacts of recent reforms.

Kristin says

The curse of my job, I can't contain my curiosity on seeing how accurate this is.

Mike says

An excellent primer for anyone interested in learning about how the U.S. healthcare system works (or doesn't work...); concise and easy to read with numerous figures, charts, and tables. The section that explains the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is particularly useful.

Michael says

A first-rate intro to health care in the U.S., with chapters on the following:

1. Health Care Systems and Delivery
2. Health Care Providers
3. Insurance and Economics
4. Research, Pharmaceuticals, and Medical Devices
5. Policy and Reform

Quite an accomplishment, especially since the authors are in medical school! Great resources for further reading too.

John A Stern says

Great Introduction to a Complex Industry

If you are looking for a fast but effective introduction to healthcare systems, this is it! From Politics to Structure, this touches on it all.

Taylor says

As I now work in health care, I found this book to be an amazingly helpful quick guide to how health care in America works. While there were lots of definitions and tons of acronyms (a symptom of government agencies), this book gave me a good overview while allowing me to dive in deeper to particular sections of interest. I think it would make for a good reference book in the future, and as time permits, I hope to dive into the suggested readings.

I also recommended this book to my mom who I thought would find various sections and stats presented within insightful. It's a quick read for anyone who wants to understand some of the problems our system faces.

Jacob Greenmyer says

A great book for anyone that wants to delve into our healthcare system. NO it is not a particularly captivating book unless you are interested in learning more about our healthcare system. YES it is very useful. One of my favorite parts was that it was unbiased. Very glad I read it before medical school

Renzhong says

Clear and concise. This book was an invaluable part of my interview prep for the medical school application process. The authors laid out a very easy to understand version of the basic structure of the US healthcare system.

Patrick Waites says

It is refreshing to read a book that is exactly what it claims to be: a well-organized, clearly written overview of the US healthcare system. It is even more remarkable that it was written by two aspiring medical students, who had yet to gain the years of experience with the system that some of their readers may have. I did find that a lot of the information was familiar to me, as someone who has been a working adult for 30 years, but that is no reason to penalize the book's rating. It definitely filled some gaps in my knowledge and will be a valuable quick reference when needed. I also highly recommend the book to young adults both to help them navigate the healthcare system for themselves and to understand one of the most controversial topics in America today. In fact, my copy is about to be loaned to a 22 year old planning to start medical school in a few months.

Beth Haynes says

A valiant effort from 2 (former)medical students to provide basic background on the US healthcare system - with the stated goal of presenting the material in a neutral, unbiased way. They did their best, and are to be commended on their effort and work. But neutral and unbiased it is not.

Most medical students enter their training with little idea of how healthcare is delivered or the extent and complexity of how medical care is payed for in the US. (Most doctors don't understand it either.) The subtitle "a clear an concise guide" is apt. The book is a great starting place to obtain an introduction and overview - but, as the authors readily admit, there is no way to cover it all.

Some of the topics are presented with opposing views included, but the presentation as a whole is colored by the author's skepticism toward markets and money in medicine. I suspect the authors, steeped in the viewpoint of academic medicine, are unaware of how much that viewpoint permeates and limits their ability to even think about U.S. healthcare, let alone explain it in an unbiased way.

Because I disagree so intensely with the pervasive government-centric viewpoint of academic medicine, areas of bias leap out at me. It's easy for me to be critical. I can't emphasize enough how impressed I am at the authors' overall job. This book will be of tremendous help to any one interested in better understanding U.S. healthcare. It is indeed "clear and concise" and the authors deserve our gratitude.

My only really beef is their claim of neutrality. The book needs a companion commentary which addresses

and challenges their underlying assumptions.

A few examples:

1. The ACA is described as having "many unforeseen problems." Unforeseen? Really? I gave up clinical medicine to work in policy because even before the ACA passed, I could see the disruption of the patient-doctor relationship which would occur. The cost overruns, rising premiums, and failure to curb the rising cost of medical care were predicted by many, many people. Supporters of the ACA may not have foreseen the problems - but its critics most certainly did.
2. Quoting the poor ranking of US in infant mortality in international comparisons. This has become a meme in arguments for more government involvement in healthcare. However, multiple critiques bring serious question to this claim, demonstrating how the data it's based on is inadequate in both quality and quantity.
3. Almost all of the the sources quoted are biased toward a large role for government in healthcare and critical of free markets: Sara Kliff, Jonathan Cohn, Atul Gawande, Commonwealth Fund, Dartmouth Atlas study, Kaiser Family Foundation. They did reference John Goodman - but what about Michael Cannon (Cato) and Bob Moffit (Heritage) or even Avik Roy (Forbes/Manhattan Institute)?
4. Stating physician-owned hospitals are subject to possible conflict of interests - which of course they are - but this implies that somehow non-physician owned hospitals are somehow LESS subject to conflicts of interest. Really? As proof, they quote a study showing physician owners of ambulatory surgery centers are more likely to recommend surgery. Even if this is true, it tells us nothing about whether those recommendations are better or worse for patients.
5. Lauding the "comprehensive and coordinated care" within Patient-Centered Medical Homes while in the next sentence describing "Boutique/Concierge" practices, with no mention of low-cost direct primary care. PCMH and Accountable Care Organizations were the inadequately tested models of policy wonks heavily conscripted into the carrots-and-stick payment formulas of the ACA. Promoters of these models too often take their lofty goals and descriptions as equivalent to having achieved those goals. (ACOs are designed to increase care coordination and lower costs, therefore that's what they do - in absence of adequate real experience and data.) The authors do state these models "show promise but it's unclear what their long-term impact will be." If this is so - was it really wise to make these payment models a key part of health reform law, and require an act of Congress to escape from a bad idea?
6. References to the US healthcare "system" as "fragmented" demonstrates a bias against the spontaneous order of markets and in favor of centrally designed and implemented planning. Our "system" can also be viewed as multi-sourced and anti-fragile. Same system, different viewpoint, different language and you end up with a whole different connotation to the description. Fragmentation is "bad" - but "anti-fragile" is "good."
7. Failure to connect the shortage of primary care physicians, or the soaring cost of education, to government policies
8. Standard misunderstanding of the purpose and function of insurance, and the cause of adverse selection
9. characterization of HSAs as primarily benefiting the young and healthy with a steady income
10. the belief that "healthcare is different" and can not be handled as other types of goods and services.

And there are so many more.

With these examples I am not trying to denigrate the work of these authors. I'm really not. I am so grateful they took on this much needed task. Their underlying assumptions are based on what is taught and defended in academic medicine. Just don't call it neutral.

I could not write a neutral book on healthcare. We all are fish swimming in our sea of personal experience and knowledge - and there's no other way to be! And, we can't see the water we swim in. Reading this book has given me the idea that if I ever write a book, well before it's published, I need to have it previewed and critiqued by people who do not share my free market orientation.

Nor am I saying the U.S. doesn't need substantial improvement in how we treat healthcare. We have an incredibly toxic mix of government control and market forces which insulates medical care from competition on price and quality. We've ended up with the worst of both worlds: artificially high prices, and quality of care that neither physicians nor patients are satisfied with.

Conclusion: Excellent start on a much needed resource introducing the basic components of U.S. healthcare. And, there's more that needs to be explained.

Martnehz says

This was one of the most intellectually gratifying nonfiction books I've read in quite some time. Even in the Introduction you get a good sense of how these two doe-eyed, green medical professionals are going to approach the profuse amount of information that they've collected in trying to write this handbook for the John Everyman.

I am no stranger to medical terminology, but the way that these two authors (Askin & Moore) were able to break down and simplify some of the most complex (sometimes muddled) concepts in the healthcare industry made me smile proudly and happy to be a Millenial in America.

This book is worth the read if you've ever had a question about how doctors get paid
This book is worth the read if you've ever had a question about insurance.

This book is worth the read if you've ever had a question about how hospitals operate.

This book is worth the read if you've ever had a question about how complicated is healthcare.

This book is worth the read if you have questions about Obamacare.

This book is worth the read if you have questions about why you wait as long as you do.

This book is worth the read if you have questions about your health.

This book is worth the read if you have questions about where we go from here.

This book isn't a panacea onto all of your questions, but it's a wonderful primer that I hope more people use to start learning more and asking better questions. In terms of providing "healthcare fluency" this book would be a great one to keep on your shelves at home.

Ben Munger says

Very nice short overview of the healthcare system. It includes some information that is hard to access such as the financing system for Graduate Medical Education.
