



Contents

Introduction

Deaths

Theory

Problem

Shame

Education

Future

Internet

Training

Money

Plan

Research

Learning

Causes

FAQ 1

FAQ 2

FAQ 3

FAQ 4

Links

School

Contact

## America's Healthcare System is the Third Leading Cause of Death

**Barbara Starfield, M.D. (2000)**

**Summary by Kah Ying Choo**

**This Journal of the** American Medical Association article illuminates the failure of the U.S. medical system in providing decent medical care for Americans.



**In spite of the rising health care costs that provide the illusion of** improving health care, the American people do not enjoy good health, compared with their counterparts in the industrialized nations. Among thirteen countries including Japan, Sweden, France and Canada, the U.S. was ranked 12th, based on the measurement of 16 health indicators such as life expectancy, low-birth-weight averages and infant mortality. In another comparison reported by the World Health Organization that used a different set of health indicators, the U.S. also fared poorly with a ranking of 15 among 25 industrialized nations.

**Although many people attribute poor health to the bad habits of the** American public, Starfield (2000) points out that the Americans do not lead an unhealthy lifestyle compared to their counterparts. For example, only 28 percent of the male population in the U.S. smoked, thus making it the third best nation in the category of smoking among the 13 industrialized nations. The U.S. population also achieved a high ranking (5th best) for alcohol consumption. In the category of men aged 50 to 70 years, the U.S. had the third lowest mean cholesterol concentrations among 13 industrialized nations. Therefore, the perception that the American public's poor health is a result of their negative health habits is false.

**Even more significantly, the medical system has played a large role in** undermining the health of Americans. According to several research studies in the last decade, a total of 225,000 Americans per year have died as a result of their medical treatments:

First they ignore  
you,  
then they laugh  
at you,  
then they fight  
you,  
then you win.

*Mahatma  
Gandhi*



- **12,000 deaths per year due to unnecessary surgery**
- **7000 deaths per year due to medication errors in hospitals**
- **20,000 deaths per year due to other errors in hospitals**
- **80,000 deaths per year due to infections in hospitals**
- **106,000 deaths per year due to negative effects of drugs**

**Thus, America's healthcare-system-induced deaths are the third leading cause of the death in the U.S., after heart disease and cancer.**

**One of the key problems of the U.S. health system is that as many as 40 million people in the U.S. do not have access to healthcare.** The social and economic inequalities that are an integral part of American society are mirrored in the inequality of access to the health care system. Essentially, families of low socioeconomic status are cut off from receiving a decent level of health care.

**By citing these statistics, Starfield (2000) highlights the need to** examine the type of health care provided to the U.S. population. The traditional medical paradigm that emphasizes the use of prescription medicine and medical treatment has not only failed to improve the health of Americans, but also led to the decline in the overall well-being of Americans. Starfield's (2000) comparison of the medical systems of Japan and the U.S. captures the fundamental differences in the treatment approach. Unlike the U.S., Japan has the healthiest population among the industrialized nations. Instead of relying on sophisticated technology and professional personnel for medical treatment as in the U.S., Japan uses its technology solely for diagnostic purposes. Furthermore, in Japan, family members, rather than hospital staff, are involved in caring for the patients.

**The success of the Japanese medical system testifies to the dire need** for Americans to alter their philosophical approach towards health and treatment. In

the blind reliance on drugs, surgery, technology and medical establishments, the American medical system has inflicted more harm than good on the U.S. population. Starfield's (2000) article is invaluable in unveiling the catastrophic effects of the medical treatments provided to the American people. In order to improve the medical system, American policymakers and the medical establishment need to adopt a comprehensive approach and critically examine the failure of the richest country in the world to provide decent health care for its people. The reason that they have difficulty doing that is explained on the following page.

Starfield, B. (2000, July 26). Is US health really the best in the world? Journal of the American Medical Association, 284(4), 483-485. [Obtain full reprint.](#)

[Printable Page](#) | [Back](#) | [Top](#) | [Next](#) | [Printable Site](#)