

Book Reviews

Ayres, Stephen M. *Health Care in the United States: The Facts and the Choices* (The Last Quarter Century: A Guide to the Issues and the Literature, no. 4). Chicago: American Library Association, 1996. 275p. \$38. (ISBN 0-8389-0663-X.)

Despite the failure of national legislation for health care reform, the restructuring of America's health care delivery system is under way. The trend away from specialist, inpatient health care toward generalist, outpatient care has created fractures in well-established models of health sciences education and practice. Educators are redesigning the curriculum, and administrators are seeking new ways to support students and reward preceptors. Also, the nature of office-based practice in a managed care environment demands that practitioners change their behaviors. They must learn to compute disease probabilities for the populations they serve, to follow externally defined practice guidelines, to treat problems that were once referred to colleagues, and to involve patients actively in their own care.

The political, social, and economic factors that are causing these changes are complex and interrelated. In this volume, Stephen M. Ayres, M.D., former dean of the School of Medicine, Medical College of Virginia, attempts to help the general reader understand both the current U.S. health care system and recent attempts at its reform. Specifically, the book "explores the general health of Americans, the current American medical enterprise's contribution to good health, changes that could improve the public health, and the failure of elected leaders to change the system when the public so clearly supports reform."

The volume begins with a brief history of the growth of scientific medical

practice, provides an overview of concepts of health and disease, and reviews the current professional training of doctors and nurses. Then, the author summarizes the economic and political structures that have developed around professional practice and health care delivery. After exploring the problems with the current system, he concludes with a review of President Clinton's failed health reform initiative and a proposal for change.

Detailed footnotes and an annotated bibliography follow each chapter. Books dominate the bibliographies, and book titles and authors are listed in the index. Periodical literature is referenced in the footnotes of most chapters; index access to those citations is limited to author names that point to the original text reference. The index also includes subjects and some essay titles. An appendix of selected resources for research on health care is included at the end of the volume. Written by Claire Hoffman, a librarian at the Tompkins-McCaw Library, the guide suggests a general research approach and recommended starting points. Examples of print and electronic resources are listed, as are the names and addresses of fifteen public policy organizations.

Ayres provides a useful overview of the many sociologic and economic factors affecting health care. He cares deeply about the issues, does not hide his views about the need for reform, and offers a proposal for reform that is "understandable, workable and cost-effective." His writing style wavers between academic and conversational: some sections are carefully annotated and some are not, some are carefully neutral in tone and some are not. The author draws heavily upon a core set of published medical



sociologies, particularly Paul Starr's *The Transformation of American Medicine*, Victor Fuchs's *Future of Health Policy*, and a 1977 issue of *Daedalus* devoted to American health care.

Two major flaws detract from the overall success of this book. First, the final editing was inadequate: there are numerous errors of typography (e.g., Stark instead of Starr in the index, Harry & Louis in the text) and style ["Older men (and they were almost always male) . . ."]. The data in the columns labeled "Developed & Developing" in figure 2-2 seem to be reversed, given assertions made in the accompanying text. Concepts are often introduced without explanation (e.g., 'overbedded hospitals'), and unsupported assertions abound (e.g., "Unfortunately, the use of discounted fees and the employment of thousands of new people . . . have destabilized the health care system"). The same sentence ("One physician bucked the tide of medical obstruction. . .") appears on page 131 and again on page 177; it also contains an unreferenced quote. Though often merely a nuisance, preventable errors such as these detract from the authority of the text.

The second flaw relates to the integration of concepts across chapters. The chapters seem to have been written to serve as self-contained units. This can be disconcerting for those readers who attempt to read the book from cover to cover. For example, the same statistics are reported in several different places, and some concepts (and some reference works) are introduced and explained several times, each time as if they were new to the reader. Frequently referenced books (such as those by Paul Starr) appear in several chapter bibliographies, sometimes with a different annotation. More important, introducing only that piece of a concept which relates to the theme of the chapter makes complex topics such as managed competition and the role of third-party insurers difficult to

follow and synthesize. This approach may leave readers of a single chapter with the false impression that they know everything the author has to say about a given issue.

In short, the volume is a mixed blessing. For careful general readers, it explains some of the health care reform issues that appear daily in newscasts and newspapers. Via footnotes and bibliography, it suggests some beginning points for those who want to explore a topic in more depth. It is probably most appropriate for a public, high school, or community college library, but I would not recommend it for an academic health sciences library.—Valerie Florance, *University of Rochester Medical Center*.

Greening the College Curriculum: A Guide to Environmental Teaching in the Liberal Arts. Eds. Jonathan Collett and Stephen Karakashian. Washington, D.C.: Island Pr., 1996. 328p. \$40 cloth (ISBN 1-55963-421-9); \$22 paper (ISBN 1-55963-422-7.) LC 95-39225.

Published as a project of the Rainforest Alliance, *Greening the College Curriculum* was purportedly prepared to mainstream environmental education in academe. Although intended for the use of faculty members interested in integrating environmental teaching into their discipline-based courses, faculty to whom this concept may be new, administrators, and trustees also might benefit from perusing this volume for the thoughtful and thought-provoking ideas it explores.

The core of the work comprises ten discipline-specific chapters. Covered are anthropology, biology, economics, geography, history, literature, media and journalism, philosophy, political science, and religion. Each chapter is written or cowritten by a professor or professor emeritus of the discipline under review. The editors acknowledge lapses in coverage and suggest that other areas may be treated in a second edition. They also state that sociology was deliberately omitted