

Dissecting American Health Care

Douglas Kamerow

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New developments in medicine, medical policy and politics, and societal perspectives on medicine provide continuous fodder for thought and discussion among those of us who care for patients day in and day out. Doug Kamerow, MD, a family physician and former assistant surgeon general,

has had the unique opportunity to regularly share such musings with the rest of us on a regular basis as a commentator in the *British Medical Journal* and on NPR since 2007. In *Dissecting American Health Care*, he collects 47 of these written and oral essays into a short volume that provides an interesting and easily readable retrospective on medical developments of the past 4 years.

Some pieces ponder the impact of innovative approaches to the delivery of health care, such as the May 2007 article on a health system's 90-day guarantee on coronary artery bypass surgery and the July 2007 article on retail clinics. Others, reflecting on trends in patient expectations and preferences such as complementary medicine and vaccine refusal,

are good reminders that doctors and patients do not always make the same assumptions, nor can they take them for granted. Included are several essays addressing the interplay between politics and medical science in recent national medical controversies, which provide enlightening (if not frightening) reading for practitioners and teachers who aspire to base medical care primarily on the best evidence. Finally, there are also quite a few essays throughout the book commenting or reflecting on recent developments in US health care reform—made all the more interesting by the author's inclusion of essays in which his predictions about the course of health care reform turned out to be incorrect.

Two minor improvements I would recommend for a future edition of this book would be to strengthen the quality of the books' binding and to move references that are provided for each essay from the current "bibliography" section at the end of the book to within each essay in the book itself.

This is a short, portable, and easily readable volume. All the essays are brief, so the book is perfectly suited for keeping on hand for those times when a few minutes are available to sneak in some reading. This book would also be suited to use in teaching on medicine and politics or medicine and society—the essays would provide interesting discussion starters for student or resident discussion groups.

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