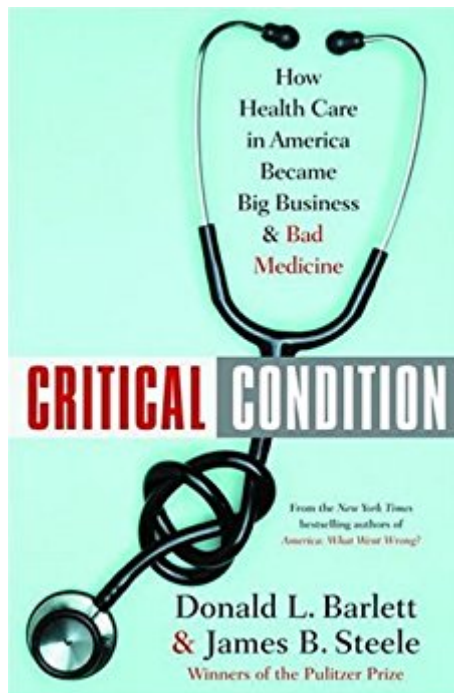


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Critical Condition: How Health Care In America Became Big Business--and Bad Medicine



Synopsis

Exposing the most controversial, little-known practices of America's most flawed system, Time magazine's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative team pulls back the curtain on the health care industry to explain exactly how things grew so out of control. Dirty examination and operating rooms in doctors' offices and hospitals . . . Health care executives pulling in millions in bonuses for denying treatment to the sick . . . More than 100 million people with inadequate or no medical coverage . . . This may sound like the predicament of a third-world nation, but this is America's health care reality today. The U.S. spends more on health care than any other nation, yet our benefits are shrinking and life expectancy is shorter here than in countries that spend significantly less per capita. Meanwhile, HMOs, pharmaceutical companies, and hospital chains reap tremendous profits, while politicians beholden to insurers and drug companies enact legislation for the benefit of the few rather than the many, while the entire system is on the verge of collapse. In **CRITICAL CONDITION**, award-winning investigative journalists Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele expose the horror of what health care in America has become. They profile patients and doctors trapped by the system and offer startling personal stories that illuminate what's gone wrong. Doctors tell of being second-guessed and undermined by health care insurers; nurses recount chilling tales of hospital meltdowns; patients explain how they've been victimized by a system that is meant to care for them. Drug companies profit by selling pills in the same manner that Madison Avenue sells soap, while Wall Street rakes in billions by building up and then tearing down health care businesses. And politicians pass legislation perpetuating the injustices and outright fraud the system encourages. By analyzing the industry and offering an insightful prescription for getting it back on the right track, **CRITICAL CONDITION** is an enormously compelling investigative work that addresses the concerns of every American.

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Customer Reviews

For those people who vaguely remember when healthcare & insurance was generally a manageable aspect of our lives (as opposed to being a source of stress & potential financial ruin), this book will explain very well how healthcare in US arrived at the point where it is today. For younger readers, this book will remind them that once upon a time, there was a country where insurance was fairly comprehensive & affordable, hospitals were oriented towards community rather than being part of a bottom-line-obsessed corporation, and pharmaceutical commercials were not littering the airwaves. The authors do an excellent job of showing that the shift, on every level of healthcare, to a market-based economic model has achieved exactly the opposite of what the proponents of the free market claimed would happen. Instead of streamlining healthcare & making it as a whole more efficient and affordable, the shift to the free market has actually created a massive bureaucracy (which conservatives claim to loath) and a far less efficient healthcare system. Certainly it is not any more affordable. Anyone who is familiar with medical collections & with the stunning increase in bankruptcies over the last few years can attest to this. The authors underscore their arguments with a litany of horror stories of patients dying or suffering hugely at the hands of a hopelessly tangled system which emphasizes the bottom line over the welfare of the patient. All of this is well and good, and mighty depressing. However, only a minimal amount of time is devoted to what might be done about it.

It's no secret that American healthcare has some problems. I wanted to get more background on this issue, and I discovered "Critical Condition." I found it to be readable, and it illuminated a number of healthcare crisis points. If you've ever read "The Rainmaker" by John Grisham, you'll have some idea of the stories this book contains. Free market healthcare was touted as the best possible way

to ensure low prices and good treatment via competition (oddly enough, by the same guy who came up with the "body count" progress-measurement system in Vietnam.). But the authors contend it has led to higher costs, inferior care, and an uninsured class where millions are only an illness or accident away from financial ruin. And to top it off, the insurance companies have taken away patient care decision-making away from the doctors. I've seen and experienced some of the issues highlighted in "Critical Condition," and I'm appalled that a so-called "hyperpower" has a health care system where families must conduct bake sales to cover medical bills. I commend the authors for illustrating this problem in layman's terms. However, they aren't so clear when it comes to a solution, and a couple of points stand out. First, the authors criticize efforts to speed up the introduction of new medicines. They argue that some drug companies do this to make a quick buck at the expense of patients. Perhaps they have a point, but on the other hand those with terminal cancer or AIDS have pushed for quicker drug introduction because their lives are on the line. Don't people in this category deserve to take a chance that may save them, especially if they have nothing to lose and everything to gain? Second, they argue for a standard IT system to ease the exchange of medical information.

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