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BE CAREFUL WHEN RELYING ON THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION HEALTHCARE RANKINGS!



By Stephen L. Bakke  July 14, 2017

Here's what provoked me:

The World Health Organization and The Commonwealth Fund both reached very critical conclusions about the U.S. healthcare system. The WHO report was released in 2000, while The Commonwealth Fund is more recent. They were outrageous in their flawed assumptions and methodology. These reports provide some of the basis for people still casting aspersions on our healthcare system.

Here's my response:

Be Careful When Relying on the World Health Organization Healthcare Rankings!

A 7/12 letter objected to an "Other Views" editorial critical of the single-payer concept. The writer stated: "According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. ranks 37th in overall health system performance."

Before giving this 17 year-old WHO report too much credibility, consider some serious flaws:

- The WHO evaluated healthcare quality based on life expectancy. Critics say that isn't a valid method since many things cause premature death that have nothing to do with medical care – e.g. transportation accidents and homicide rates. In fact, adjusting for "fatal injury" rates, U.S. life expectancy is actually near the top of all industrialized countries, and highest among the wealthiest nations.
- Because the WHO study built in a bias for countries with universal insurance, one with high quality overall care, but with some "unequal distribution" would rank below one with low average care quality, but with more equally distributed universal coverage.

Also, a pre-Obamacare Commonwealth Fund report presented scathing criticism of our healthcare system. I read the report and found this caveat:

"Any attempt to assess the relative performance of countries has inherent limitations. These rankings summarize evidence on measures of high performance based on national mortality data and the perceptions and experiences of patients and physicians. They do not capture important dimensions of effectiveness or efficiency that might be obtained from medical records or administrative data....."

The researchers declared U.S. healthcare inferior based only on unadjusted mortality statistics, and interviews. They didn't even review medical records to determine medical outcomes! That's outrageous!