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WORLDWIDE HEALTH CARE RANKINGS: THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

By Steve Bakke  November 18, 2019



A November 17 letter took issue with an Opinion Exchange offering on November 10, "Medicare for All: How to count costs." The letter writer's concern was that the earlier article "astutely avoids one important point: The U.S. ranks 27th worldwide in providing health care."

While he didn't provide the source for his claim, it very likely came from The Commonwealth Fund which recently warned us that: "Any international comparison of health care is subject to inherent weaknesses such as the absence of medical record clinical information or timely health data.....Different measures, moreover, are given equal weight in the rankings...."

That tells us: medical records and outcomes weren't reviewed and don't impact the rankings, and no adjustments were made for cross-border measurement differences. Furthermore, this information comes mostly from surveys of patients' attitudes, with no attempt to adjust for cultural expectations.

Ignoring measurement differences means infant mortality rate comparisons are made using different definitions of "live births," and longevity statistics don't adjust for the statistical effect of deaths from violent crimes. Medical care can't stop violence.

One problem we've had with optimizing our health care system is that we tend to look for changes based on superficial "studies" such as these.