



A Story Worth Reading

Book Review by Richard L. Reece, MD

Passion for Patients, By Lee Beecher, MD with Dave Racer, MLitt

Whenever I read a book review, I ask myself: What is the book about? Is it worth its price? What the biases of its reviewer?

This book is the story of the 40-year career of Doctor Lee Beecher, a clinical psychiatrist. It is the story of how managed care and ObamaCare has affected Doctor Beecher's practice and how it has altered and disrupted the practices of other physicians.

It is the story of misdirected top down third party interferences into patient –doctor relationships.

It is the story of how noble intentions, to offer affordable insurance coverage to all Americans, have gone awry.

It is the story of how managed care and ObamaCare's promises to allow patients to keep their doctors and health plans and to reduce premiums have failed, and have instead produced the opposite – the loss of doctors and health plans and the rise of premiums and deductibles to unaffordable levels.

It is the story of how federal and insurer efforts to make health care more effective and efficient have demoralized vast numbers of physicians by shortening their time with patients, imposing formidable "hassle factors" that take the joy out of medical practice, reducing doctors to data-entry clerks, while overburdening them with floods of patients who seek comprehensive benefits and a free lunch.

It is the story of record numbers of physician burnouts, of concentration on the "system" rather than on the needs of patients and doctors, of vast sums of money spent on managers, policy experts, information technologists, data processing manipulations in the names of transparency and objectivity, most of which have failed to achieve the goals of improved quality, more effective access, and better outcomes.

It is the story of a failed national experiment. During the seven years of ObamaCare, increases in longevity has ground to a halt, with much shorter life expectancies than in nations with fewer resources.

It is the story of politically correct speech. This speech is characterized by talk of compassion using other people's money to reduce inequality, to achieve social justice, and to right the wrongs of the past.

It is the story of psychiatrists as canaries in the coal mine, how federal regulations and guidelines and mandates have conspired to snuff out the flames of patient privacy, doctor confidentiality, and entrepreneurial innovation.

It is the story of how metadata accumulation, artificial intelligence, and elegant algorithms often fall short of satisfying, mollifying, and improving the human condition.

Doctor Beecher explains the various iterations of these stories in fourteen chapters : Focus on the Patient on the Patients, Canary in the Coal Mine, Evolution of Top-Down Medical Care, Human Relations Matter Most, Lessons Learned, Going Independent Meant Refusing Third-Party Payments, Data and Physician Burnout, Codes and More Codes, Much More than Diagnosis, Patient-Centered Care Faces Many Challenges, The “Best” Patient -Physician Model: Skin the Game for Physicians and Patients, Funding Medial Care with Skin in the Game; and Paying for Medical Care.

Doctor Beecher is a clinical psychiatry activist. He has served as a spokesperson of psychiatry at the local, state, regional, and national levels. He has written scores of medical articles, position papers, and reviews. He has witnessed the transformation of clinical psychiatry from a respected patient-intensive medical specialty to reducing and relegating these specialists to the task of checking and prescribing psychoactive drugs during 15-minute visits. He responded to this demotion of professional status by switching to a cash-only practice in 2005. He says he was never happier than working in his cash-only practice because doing this clarified and cleansed the doctor patient relationship, and leveraged its power to help individual patients.

I recommend the book for anybody interested in the impact of top-down managed care and ObamaCare on doctor-patient relationships. It is a labor of love written because of his passion for understanding and helping patients. This understanding often requires multiple sessions over the course of months and even years, and it does not come easily. The book is honest, fair-minded, and well-documented. It is written from the heart.

It is not a screed against ObamaCare, but Doctor Beecher does not hesitate to criticize the ACA health law's limitations. He points out the law has driven 45% of clinical psychiatrists into direct pay practices. He also notes that roughly 40% of doctors no longer accept Medicare and Medicaid patients. He is well aware that direct pay practices are not a universal antidote for the flaws of ObamaCare, but they hold an important place in the US health care system.

What are the biases of this reviewer? I suspect they are the biases of both Doctor Beecher and me. Like most physicians and Americans in general, we are a little bit Liberal and a little bit Conservative. We appreciate the virtues and necessities of Medicare and Medicaid. We believe no one should go bankrupt from paying for medical expenses. We believe medical coverage should have a catastrophic lid. We are fans of expanded Health Savings Accounts. We believe patients are very smart people who can and should choose and know the scope of health plans they need and the type of physicians they want. We also believe that treatment recommendations and decisions must be directed “bottom up” through trusting, collaborative doctor-patient relationships rather than imposed “top down” on patients and doctors by an arbitrary health care system.

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Richard L. Reece, MD, is the author and publisher of the [Medinnovation and Health Reform Blog](#), and has authored more than seven books on healthcare during a writing career that spans more than 50 years. The former publisher of *Reece Report*, Dr. Reece is a retired pathologist, national speaker, and known as a witty and insightful commentator on health care reform.