

Interesting Statistics about the U.S. Health Care System

Compiled by HealthReformQuestions.com for the Physicians Health Foundation

- America's infant mortality rate is higher than 47 other countries, according to the U.S. CIA World Fact Book, including many much less developed countries and many countries with government-run health care systems.
- Infant mortality rates can be a poor indicator of the success or failure of the health care system and that America's high infant mortality rate is partially driven by the U.S. commitment to save the smallest newborns.
- U.S. Counts More Babies as Born Alive than other Countries Do: Many babies who are born too premature have little to no hope of living. Yet the United States counts these babies as born alive and therefore as infant deaths, when other developed countries categorize them as "still-born." Analysts estimate that this fact alone could inflate the United States infant mortality rate by 40 percent. (National Institute for Health)
- Demographic factors such as obesity, substance abuse, race, and age contribute to the United States misleadingly high infant mortality rate. For example, teenagers who give birth are more likely to have low-weight babies, who are less likely to survive. The United States has a much higher rate of teenage births than do other OECD countries. (National Bureau of Economic Research and the American Enterprise Institute)
- A study for the National Bureau of Economic Research found that if you control weight at birth alone, the United States has a lower infant mortality rate than does Canada. (National Bureau of Economic Research)
- America ranks 42nd among countries for life expectancy at birth. (MSNBC). But this measure doesn't tell us much about the effectiveness of the U.S. health care system.
- The flaws in infant mortality (discussed previously) also affect the life expectancy numbers.
- Demographic and life style factors (such as obesity, incidents of smoking) also have a profound effect on a population's life expectancy, and have little reflection on the effectiveness of the health care system.
- The United States also has a much higher rate of death due to accidents and crime than other developed countries, which reduces the average U.S. life expectancy. This is a serious problem on its own, but it is largely unrelated to the quality of our health care system.
- A better assessment of a health care system's effectiveness is how it addresses actual illnesses.
- The United States is ranked #1 in the world for "responsiveness to the needs and choices of the individual patient" (World Health Organization)
- The United States has the highest survival rate of any OECD country? (Forbes and the Lancet Oncology Journal)
- The United States leads the world in new medical innovations.
- A 2009 study shows American scientists won the Nobel Prize in 33 out of the previous 40 years, whereas scientists from the entire rest of the world won it in only 25 out of those 40 years (often it was shared between Americans and non-Americans). Additionally, of the top 27 drugs and devices, U.S. physicians, companies, and scientists had a hand in developing 20 of them, whereas European physicians, companies and scientists only had a hand in 14. (Cato Institute)

- This means that even the health care that patients are getting in Canada, Europe, Australia, and other places is partly due to the creative capacities of the U.S. health care system.
- Americans actually report significantly shorter waiting times than patients in other countries?
- Just five percent of Americans report having to wait more than four months for elective surgery, compared to Australia (23 percent), Canada (27 percent), New Zealand (26 percent) and the United Kingdom (38 percent). (OECD report)
- Americans had more access to new cancer fighting drugs than Canadians or Europeans because of their longer approval process. In some cases, it took Canada more than 180 days longer to green light a new cancer treatment than in the U.S. (Fraser Institute)
- Canadians periodically have to turn to the United States for the use of their highly specialized medical facilities. For example, in 2007, a woman from Calgary, Canada had to be flown to Montana to deliver quadruplets, because there were no adequate neonatal facilities available. Similarly women from Alberta, Canada had to be transferred to Montana to deliver babies because of a shortage of neonatal facilities. (CBC News)
- The United States spends more than any other country in the world on health care and more Americans worry about the cost of medical care than other countries. Yet did you know that there many reasons why the U.S. spends more, and that some of those are because of government policies that drive up costs?
- The United States develops most new health care techniques and treatments, and makes use of these new innovations to try to save lives that other countries might deem hopeless. As described previously, babies born prematurely receive extensive—and expensive—treatment protocols. These extreme measures can be costly. (American Enterprise Institute).
- Most working age Americans obtain health insurance through their employers. They do not pay directly for health services, and they don't even directly choose their health insurance provider. This means that many Americans have no reason to consider cost when making health care decisions, which encourages overconsumption and makes it possible for health service providers to charge higher prices. (Health Affairs and Forbes).
- The federal government runs Medicare and Medicaid, two expensive government insurance programs that cover about 30 percent of the Americans (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation). The way these programs are operated has a profound effect on the private market.
- Governments require insurers to include more and more treatments and services in our insurance policies. This encourages over-consumption of some procedures, and means that we are paying to finance many treatments that we may not want, need, or use. State and federal mandates raise health insurance premiums by between 10 and 50 percent. (Council for Affordable Health Insurance)
- Hospitals and doctors fear costly medical malpractice suits so carry insurance and issuing unnecessary tests to minimize the potential for lawsuits. . These push our overall health care spending higher, and affect the insurance prices for all Americans. Analysts estimate that the medical malpractice increase health care costs by between 7.2 and 12.7 percent. (Heartland Institute and Pacific Research Institute)



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