



Books and other media

Livres et autres documents

A Design for the Future of Health Care

Larry Bryan. 152 pp. Illust. Key Porter Books, Toronto. 1996. \$19.95. ISBN 1-55013-810-3

Overall rating:	Good
Strengths:	Comprehensive and practical presentation of reforms needed to cure an ailing health care system
Weaknesses:	Many of the opinions expressed are not supported by references
Audience:	Readers interested in current ideas on health care reform

Dr. Larry Bryan's ideas for a reformed and integrated health care system seem to burst forth and spill onto the pages of his book. Bryan speaks from his experience as a physician, former president of Foothills Hospital in Calgary and former chief executive officer of the Calgary Regional Health Authority. In his words, the book is "designed to provoke reactions from all those interested in health care, but especially from people working in health care."

The book touches on many of the most important current issues in health care system reform (including funding based on population needs, devolution of health care financing to regional authorities, primary health care reform, managed competition, physician payment reform, integrated health care systems and outcomes measurement). It is a very good primer for readers who want to catch up on the current thinking about Canadian (and international) health care reform.

A weak point in the book is that Bryan does not take the time at the beginning to lay out the desirable objectives in designing a superior health care system or the qualities that such a system should have. As well, many of Bryan's normative statements are not referenced or supported. Bryan

notes that he does not want to get bogged down in details. For example, I found that his discussion of physician payment reforms was poorly linked with his recommendations for devolution of health care funding to regional authorities. Similarly, the discussion of new restrictions on patient choice of provider is not developed well enough to instil confidence that such restrictions will not constitute a major sacrifice. Nurses will be very disappointed with the lack of attention paid to their profession.

Nevertheless, I found myself agreeing with many of Bryan's main arguments and the "big-picture" reforms that he envisions. The book is very thoughtful and comprehensive; it is clearly motivated by a concern for improving the overall health of the population within current or reduced health care budgets. Those who are tired of the academic view of health care reform will find that Bryan's book is firmly rooted in practical "next steps." Thus, I recommend Bryan's manifesto without hesitation as a very worthwhile read, and, at only \$19.95, a good value.

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McGill Medicine: The First Half Century, 1829-1885

Vol. 1. Joseph Hanaway and Richard Cruess. 218 pp. Illust. McGill-Queen's Press, Montreal. 1996. \$45. ISBN 0-7735-1324-8

Overall rating:	Very good
Strengths:	Authoritative, readable and well illustrated

Weaknesses:	Too few anecdotes
Audience:	McGill University graduates and history enthusiasts

This book was written with the aims of reviewing the history of McGill Medical School up to 1885 (a sequel covering 1885 to 1930 is planned), examining the philosophy of teaching medicine in those years and providing biographic sketches of the many builders of the university and the school.

The authors have met these goals admirably. This authoritative book is presented in a readable manner, admirably illustrated to show the people, places and documents of the time.

Until about 1895, teaching was conducted entirely by lecture during the 2 years of basic science. This Edinburgh system was not easily changed when Sir William Osler introduced microscopy and student involvement into medical courses. "Hands-on" teaching of anatomy was introduced and, as the elder statesmen retired, this system was also introduced to chemistry and physiology. Not explained is why Osler and other graduates of the time travelled to Europe and how they financed these postgraduate years, or why other talented Holmes medallists stayed in Montreal.

The reference section is most interesting to a browser like me, especially the lists of all graduating classes since 1833. There are also reproductions of archival documents, early letters, lists of faculty members, MD examinations and lists of prize winners and medallists.

This book will be of interest to McGill University graduates and history buffs, as it is the first complete story of Canada's first medical school.

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