

## EDC Advertorial 04/2008

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### Title

Give us Better Health, not just Better Healthcare.

### Body

Our "healthcare system" is actually a hodgepodge of "illness care" providers. We devote 17% of GDP to healthcare, but very little of that goes towards prevention and improving health. By all international standards, Americans are less healthy than residents of other countries that spend much less than we do.

What you and I demand when we purchase medical services are not these services per se but rather better health for ourselves and our families. Most people want to live long and prosper, and then check out quickly. Thus, we need to reframe the discussion from "Let's improve the healthcare system for all" towards the real goal of "Building a care system that improves the health of all."

Lets use the automotive industry as a frame of reference. How would the healthcare industry design cars? There would be massive social investments to develop car repair tools and techniques (medical procedures, drugs). But very little investment in building roads and improve driver education (public health campaigns). Body shops would be reimbursed even if they didn't fix the car's problems. Or even if the car gets damaged while in the shop (hospital-borne infections). And all drivers would pay the same insurance rates regardless of driving record.

But we know that cars are designed to prevent accidents and to provide many years of trouble-free service. If an accident is imminent the car protects the passengers (ABS, air-bags, sidebeams, etc.). And there are large investments in a good traffic-management infrastructure (highways, traffic signals). This is the equivalent to the "Social Determinants of Health:" where people live, what they eat, and their social context are as important to their health as if the roads have potholes, or the highways are poorly-designed and that leads to more car accidents and traffic congestion.

At the end of the day, do you want to buy a car that has the largest network of repair shops in your city? Or would you rather buy a car that does not need to go to the shop at all for repairs? "The best children's cancer hospital in town" is a repair shop-type statement. "We keep your children cancer-free" would be a more desirable goal for a hospital. It's time we demand more social resources be devoted to improving our "health highways" and to prevent the cars (our bodies) from breaking down in the first place.

### Byline

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