

Bradley, Elizabeth H., and Taylor, Lauren A., *The American health care paradox: why spending more is getting us less*. PublicAffairs, 2013, 248p index afp ISBN 978-1-61039-209-9, \$26.99

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The titular paradox is that the U.S., compared to other countries, manifests exorbitant health spending but “poor health outcomes” (p. xvi). Documenting the paradox, the book cites an article (“Health and social services expenditures,” *BMJ Quality & Safety*, 2011, pp. 826–31) wherein Bradley and three co-authors, using cross-national data, regress life expectancy (LE) on gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the ratio of social expenditure to health expenditure, and the shares of health and social expenditures in GDP. The article, acknowledging its limitations, emphasizes correlation, not causation. Yet the book suggests that improving American health while containing costs requires increasing social expenditure relative to health expenditure. That suggestion, although possibly correct, does not follow from data analysis in the article or book. Indeed, in the LE regressions, the estimated coefficient for health expenditure is 3.5 times greater than that for social expenditure.

As models for American reformers, the book examines Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, the world’s “true health care stars” (p. 81). The comparisons are informative but should include Australia, Italy, and Japan, which all surpass the Scandinavians in LE and the ratio of LE to per capita health expenditure.

Summing Up: The book makes interesting ideas accessible to undergraduates but should be supplemented by readings on causal inference in health research—e.g., C. Auld, D. Polsky, and A. Basu’s chapters in *The Elgar companion to health economics*, 2e, (2012), edited by A. Jones.

—J. P. Burkett, University of Rhode Island