

“Choosing Health”

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The American doctrine of exceptionalism needs to be re-evaluated, especially with regard to the health status of the American public. In a recent comprehensive report published by a branch of the National Academy of Sciences, the United States was compared to 16 “peer” countries. Focusing on data collected over the past two decades, the United States leads the field in higher mortality and inferior health. The health disadvantage of the United States compared to these other high-income countries was found to affect all age groups up to 75 years old and panned biological, behavioral, and injury-related categories.

The nine health outcomes where the United States ranked lowest are particularly reflective of the current culture.

Among wealthy nations, the United States has the highest infant mortality. A child born in America today is less likely to survive to the age of 5 compared to other high-income countries.

Since the 1950s, adolescents and young adults have died from motor vehicle accidents and homicide at a consistently higher rate. Violence and injury both on the road and off are leading causes of death in people under the age of 25.

Adolescents in the U.S. have a higher rate of pregnancy and are more likely to acquire sexually transmitted diseases.

The U.S. is number 2 in prevalence of HIV compared to other wealthy nations and ranks number 1 in prevalence of AIDS.

More Americans die of drug-related causes, from alcohol and other drugs (which include prescription medications), compared to other high-income nations.

The U.S. leads all peer countries in the prevalence of obesity. America has highest rate of obese children and also happens to be number 1 in the prevalence of diabetes in people older than 20.

America ranks number 2 in death rate from ischemic heart disease, and Americans over the age of 50 are more likely to have an adverse cardiovascular event than their peers in other high-income countries.

Lung disease is more prevalent and more commonly leads to mortality in the U.S. compared to other peer nations.

Americans claim higher rates of disability, from arthritis or activity limitation, than the other nations in the study.

As powerful as the American economy may be, the United States has higher rates of poverty and an increasingly larger income inequality than most high-income countries. However, as influential as social inequality is in regard to health, it is not the only variable. These issues are not solely related to low socioeconomic groups. In fact, white, college-educated, insured, upper-income Americans with healthy

behaviors (who don't smoke, are not overweight) are worse off than their counterparts in other wealthy countries.

It is perhaps ironic that America spends more money per capita on "healthcare" – exceedingly more than any other country – and is consistently declining in these significant outcome assessments of public health. It is true, that the healthcare system in the United States is fundamentally flawed, and that spending more money to gain access to a flawed system is not the answer. Yet, the scope of this report, entitled "U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health", does not just focus on the healthcare system.

The environment of the American public, especially as it relates to health, needs to be considered. Is the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat healthy? The health of the population is reflective of the health of our environment. Between polluting the air, the water, and the soil, for expediency or out of ignorance, and consuming more calories from increasingly less nutritious sources, it is small wonder that people are so unhealthy.

The reliance on automobiles, which increases the chances of motor vehicle accidents, promotes unsustainable energy use, and does not encourage physical activity, is part of the infrastructure. The relative ease with which both guns and drugs can be obtained, and the consequences of their prevalence are evident in the pervasiveness of violence and drug abuse (including prescriptions) in this country.

Without question, a stressful environment underlies many of these issues. A stressful environment has the potential to foster substance abuse, physical illness, criminal behavior, and violence. Environmental stressors can and should be modified, but their presence alone is not responsible for the poor choices that lead to inferior health. It is about how we as people adapt or react to the environment we help to create that will determine the caliber of our health. At the end of the day, no one is more responsible for the choices about your lifestyle and your health than you are.

Accordingly, the role of the chiropractor and of every other good-intentioned and well-informed healthcare provider is to demonstrate and share that health is a choice. That in health is freedom. Chiropractic holds as a fundamental tenet that the body has an innate ability to heal itself, and that the most important component to expressing this ability fully is clear communication between the brain, the body, and vice versa. By understanding that health comes from within, it empowers us and enlightens us to be responsible for our own choices.

This report serves as a reminder of the current American state of health. The elephant in the room is that America is the sickest first-world country on the planet. Throwing money at the problem, looking for outside-in solutions like drugs or surgery, and continuing to pollute our bodies and our environment has not worked before and it is actually making things worse. This poor health status is not *because*

of national wealth, socioeconomic status, advanced pharmaceuticals and procedures, or access to the system. Americans in *all age groups* up to 75 years old in *all categories* (biological, behavioral, socioeconomic) rank lower than their counterparts in other wealthy countries. The underlying thread of this poor health status can be traced directly to lifestyle choices. This simply means that the American people have the opportunity to continue to decline into even more inferior health, or to reorganize how they live to promote and advance personal, national, and global wellness.