

BOOKMARKS

Leading from the Front: Experiences of Canadian Physician Leaders

Edited by Chris Carruthers MD, Patricia Lightfoot DPhil (Canadian Society of Physician Executives and Canadian Medical Association). Recently our medical school introduced a unit with topics like governance of the health care system, public health and advocacy. Many students engage with the material, but some don't see its relevance. Wouldn't their time be better spent memorizing the Krebs cycle than learning about social determinants of health?

The physician leaders in this slim book (88 pages) might say doctors should develop both medical expertise and competence in systems-based practice. *Leading from the Front* is a collection of essays by 14 physicians in leadership positions with health care institutions, government, regulatory bodies and non-governmental organizations. Many emphasize that they did not enter medicine expecting to become leaders. They are candid about the challenges of leadership, yet speak with enthusiasm about the rewards. As Dr. Oscar Howell writes, "You can't have the high, if you don't have the stress." Readers uninterested in formal leadership can still find useful tips. Dr. Jean Chamberlain Froese reminds us to expect opposition. Dr. Gaetan Tardif had to learn to overcome his tendency to "diagnose" a situation and tell people how to "fix it." Dr. Richard Lessard advises us to "find the right words, the right emotion, and the right tone to be understood." Those seeking detailed guidance on how to be an effective physician leader should know that this is essentially a series of essays in which people tell their own stories: there are other resources available from these joint publishers that might provide more comprehensive advice. Nonetheless, *Leading from the Front* is concise, highly readable and may inspire those considering leadership roles in their medical careers. — Lara Hazelton MD, Halifax, NS

Leading from the front can be accessed free online at www.cma.ca/pmiresources or purchased for \$19.95.

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**The Quest for Health Reform: a Satirical History**

By Georges C. Benjamin, Theodore M. Brown, Susan Ladwig and Elyse Berkman (American Public Health Association). Laughter may be the best medicine, but when the humour focuses on health care reform in America over the last century depicted through political and editorial cartoons, you may laugh until you feel ill. As the foreword to *The Quest for Health Reform* states, the cartoonist as "one part reporter and one part advocate" is not supposed to be impartial and wholly objective; certainly, the spin of this selected collection of almost 200 cartoons, comic strips and illustrations supports radical health reform toward the ultimate goal of national universal coverage. This political perspective is not surprising as the book is very much a product of the American Public Health Association (despite the obligatory editorial opinion disclaimer), which almost since its inception has aspired to be a counterbalance to the historically reac-

tionary positions of the American Medical Association.

The focus of the majority of cartoons and the accompanying concise and lucid text is on the last 30 years — from the Clintons' failed reform package to "Obamacare"; this is not a happy story. Indeed is it is a volatile and virulent story that appears wholly inexplicable in rational terms to most observers outside the United States (and for that matter many Americans too). But like a Frommer's travel guidebook, *The Quest for Health Reform* identifies key moments, events and personalities in order to contextualize and "simplify" what is otherwise a labyrinthine situation. On this book's tour, we repeatedly encounter the spectre of universal health care portrayed as "socialism" and "communism" — even worse within the extremist rhetoric of the Tea Party Patriots. Interestingly, Canada figures positively (from a "leftist" perspective) in at least three cartoons as a place to head for reasonably priced drugs and health care. But for a second opinion seen through the lens of Canadian political cartoonists, readers might consult Felicity Pope's chapter "Political Cartoonists Respond to Medicare," in Gregory Marchildon, ed., *Making Medicare: New Perspectives on the History of Medicare in Canada* (2012).

The Quest for Health Reform concludes with the passage from the compromise-laden Affordable Care Act (ACA) which ought to take effect in 2014 and help offset the burden of millions of under- or uninsured Americans — but the book's authors are far from optimistic about the real impact the ACA might have. Indeed, they close their discussion about the battle(s) for health care reform by reiterating the cautionary phrase, "It ain't over 'til it's over." Enriching this book is the scholarly guide to further reading, along with publication data for all cartoons reproduced, which is itself a useful aid. — Jim Connor, Memorial University, St John's, NL

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