

# PREFACE

**T**his textbook has been written to guide the reader and the student of healthcare administration to develop a broad understanding of the healthcare system of the United States, with attention to its origins, its development, and its future.

The US healthcare system is incredibly complex, and it has been the subject of countless articles and books. Compared to many other works, this text will focus less on the data and specific details of the system's various elements and more on the system's history, its driving forces, and its overall direction. This approach has been taken in part because the data and details change constantly; furthermore, much of that information is covered in more specialized areas of the healthcare administration curriculum (e.g., finance, accounting, public health), where the texts can go into greater depth than this book can.

From my perspective, understanding the nature of the US healthcare system, knowing its history and transformation, and assessing its outlook for the years ahead is much more important than keeping up with the ever-shifting facts and figures. Take, for example, the rapidly increasing cost of our system. Does it really matter whether healthcare spending represents 17.9 percent of the country's gross domestic product or 18 percent? Probably not. What matters is that we understand the implications of an industry that consumes nearly 20 percent of the country's economy—in other words, one of every five dollars spent across the United States.

This book covers a broad range of topics. It looks at the development of the US healthcare system as a reflection of American beliefs and values; the various organizations, providers, and other entities that are involved in the delivery of care; healthcare economics and financing approaches; efforts to ensure quality and patient safety; and emerging technologies and directions for the future. The book also provides resources to help the reader dive deeper into any specific area that may be of interest or assigned as part of coursework. By helping the reader locate the newest data and details at the time of the assignment or research, the text has an enduring usefulness.

Healthcare issues are often the subject of great controversy and competing viewpoints and priorities. Individuals interested in healthcare administration should consider their own positions carefully and independently, and they should avoid being overly biased by any one point of view. They should develop their own views based on a wide array of facts, stories, and evidence. Helping the reader do just that—to think deeply about these complex and often confusing issues—is a central goal of this book.

We must look at the impact our healthcare system has on people, and we must tell those people's stories, much like journalists do. Stories can highlight the importance of an issue more effectively than a simple collection of facts can. John Adams once said, "Facts are stubborn things," but people's minds can be even more stubborn (US National Archives 2019). To change people's minds, make the material relevant and personal.

This book is based on a variety of sources, including academic journals, government and other websites, newspapers, magazines, healthcare organizations, and advocacy groups. People interested in the US healthcare system and related issues need to understand that literally millions of pieces of information are available to them from a diverse range of sources. They should not be limited to a few select points of view or sources of information; rather, they should cast a wide net to gain the best insight and understanding into the system. Remember: Bias is everywhere. No source is immune from it, so read and think critically. Above all, keep an open mind.

A quote commonly attributed to Albert Einstein states, "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity." Let's never forget why we learn and do what we do: We do it for the patients. As new generations of healthcare leaders and professionals become armed with a greater depth and breadth of knowledge, new solutions can be found to the intractable healthcare problems that our country has faced for more than a century. At the same time, however, managing the plethora of new technologies will be an ever-increasing challenge. We are probably inventing and developing new treatments for disease and injury faster than we can know how to appropriately use them and finance them. We have built a massive healthcare machine that focuses on treatment but not well-being; this book will explore the implications of that focus.

Moving from a healthcare system to a system of health must be a goal for the future. All stakeholders—patients, payers, providers, governments, and other institutions—need to work together to develop an optimum health and healthcare solution that will improve the lives of everyone in our country and do so at a cost the country can afford.

Once you stop learning, you start dying.  
—Albert Einstein

## Instructor Resources

This book's Instructor Resources include presentation PowerPoints, PowerPoints of the book's exhibits, answer guides to the in-book discussion questions, and essay/short-answer questions.

For the most up-to-date information about this book and its Instructor Resources, go to [ache.org/HAP](http://ache.org/HAP) and browse for the book's title, author name, or order code, 2410I.

This book's Instructor Resources are available to instructors who adopt this book for use in their course. For access information, please email [hapbooks@ache.org](mailto:hapbooks@ache.org).

## Reference

US National Archives. 2019. "Adams' Argument for the Defense: 3–4 December 1770." Accessed September 12. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/05-03-02-0001-0004-0016>.