



Review from the British Medical Journal

By David Woods

Healthcare in the New Millennium: Vision, Values and Leadership

Ian Morrison

Jassey-Bass. £29 50, pp 260, ISBN 0787951153

In Glasgow, where Ian Morrison grew up, health care is a right while carrying a machine gun is a privilege. "Somehow," he writes, America got it the wrong way round."

Morrison, a former president of the US Institute for the Future, doesn't think Americans are well served by their \$1.8 trillion a year, market-driven system – which leaves some 45 million people uninsured and in which high costs don't necessarily translate into higher quality outcomes. Infant mortality, for example, is almost double that for Japan, which spends 7.2% of its gross domestic product on healthcare – half the US percentage.

Even so, much of what he has to say about a US healthcare industry that is "tired and battle weary" and in which "doctors are cranky [and] consumers reject both government solutions and market-based reforms" is universally-applicable.

If anything is to be learned from the patchwork of US managed care – which, paradoxically, Morrison thinks might evolve through corporate amalgamations into a "virtual single payer" system – it is improved management and greater use of information technology. Healthcare is a knowledge-intensive and information-intensive industry, he writes, "yet it has not demonstrated an overarching commitment to the standardized use of new information tools."

Morrison calls for a future where doctors move beyond hankering for the good old days when they were free to practise as they saw fit without being accountable for cost or quality of care. He urges them to incorporate new models of organisation and reimbursement, to espouse technical excellence and customer service, including "e-commerce" connections between them and their patients, and, above all, to help shape a system that will restore some of their lost professional satisfaction.

In fact, the one truly global aspect of healthcare, claims Morrison, is that doctors are unhappy everywhere: "They are fearful of the future ... have had it with demanding patients, with formularies, with drug detailers ... with utilization reviewers second-guessing them ... with malpractice suits They have reason to be upset."

A new vision of healthcare, says Morrison, will involve doctors acting for their patients as clinical data collectors, holding onto their bedside manner as medicine becomes increasingly technical, and serving as "wellness coach" and knowledge navigator.

Although Morrison holds advanced degrees in geography and urban studies, he dispenses some highly effective medicine here for what ails the healthcare system and those who toil in it. His prescriptions are clearly written, if marred by some repetitiveness, and seem to achieve the therapeutic outcome he claims in his preface: "A humble attempt to provoke, inflame, excite, and insult the leaders in healthcare to stimulate them to try harder and build a better future."