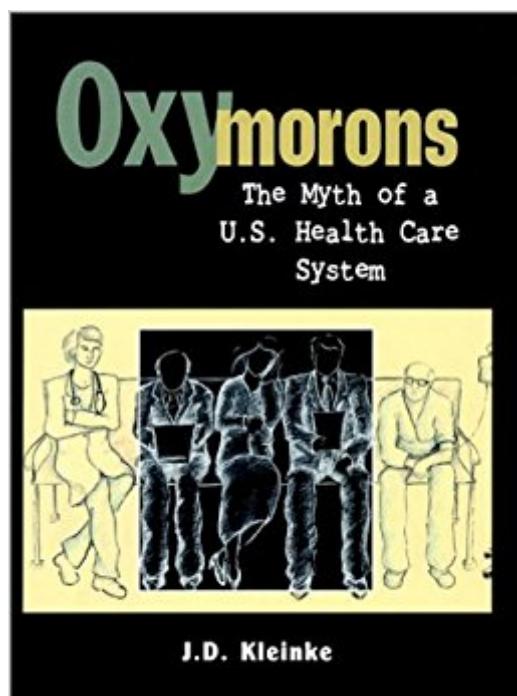


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# Oxymorons: The Myth Of A U.S. Health Care System



## **Synopsis**

In this impassioned and often vitriolic book - a follow-up to the author's bestselling Bleeding Edge: The Business of Health Care in the New Century - U.S. health care industry expert J.D. Kleinke offers an unflinching look at our broken health care system. Throughout the book, Kleinke - who was once a vocal advocate of the managed health care system - explains what went wrong and attempts to answer such perplexing questions as: Who's in charge of the American health care system? How does managed care work . . . or not work? Why have hospitals become so complex? What are the prospects for reform? Does the Internet change anything? Can we solve the growing problem of the uninsured?

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"In his first book "Bleeding Edge," and his editorials in The Wall Street Journal and elsewhere were his argument on behalf of managed care, then "Oxymorons" is his *mea culpa*." (The Wall Street Journal, 12/11/01) "The book is interesting, easy to read, and flows smoothly." (Journal for Healthcare Quality, October 2002)

"J.D. Kleinke takes us on a fearless, often harrowing journey to the beating heart of the U.S. health care system, dispelling much of the conventional wisdom about what is wrong with that system, and focusing our attention on what will and will not work to fix it. Oxymorons is a comprehensive, uncompromising, and durable milestone in the annals of health policy, medical, and business

literature." â " John Iglehart, national correspondent, New England Journal of Medicine and founding editor, Health Affairs

J.D. Kleinke uses 90% of the book to describe the woes of the US healthcare system. The tone is very very negative and the author uses words such as "moronic" way too much. It is tiring to read so much unbalanced negativism. The critique may be warranted but is not properly structured; there is a lot of focus jumping from anecdotes about payers, providers, government, consumers, consultants, etc. Kleinke even tries to explain the problems using Complexity Theory about which he clearly knows nothing. (Attempting to draw analogies between our healthcare system and sets of stiff differential equations). In the last 10% of the book Kleinke presents a solution that he does not tell how could ever be implemented. It is a combination of old utopic ideas. In short, buy this book only if you need more reasons why our healthcare system is broke.

Oxymorons is an outstanding book. It is very well written, interesting, comprehensive and insightful. Kleinke makes a compelling case of what is wrong with our employer-based health care system (which he calls dysfunctional). He argues that the best answer for the U. S. is to get employers out of the picture and come up with a consumer-choice plan (through tax credits or other means, consumers purchase their own health plans). I especially liked Chapter 9 where Kleinke reviews where he is coming from. For a period of his life, he and his wife could not afford health insurance and were among the ranks of the uninsured. He tells what it is like to scrounge for antibiotics to fight a serious sinus infection, and other experiences in trying to receive health care without the ability to pay. Naturally, he is strongly in favor of some form of coverage for the 44 million people in the U. S. who are uninsured. In the last sentence of the book, Kleinke says that only three elements in health care really matter -- patients, caregivers and medical technologies, including new drugs. I would add money, or finance. It seems to me that the payment system is the primary driver of the fragmentation we are experiencing, and that most proposals for change in health care relate to financing. In conclusion, Kleinke has written a valuable book, and one that should generate plenty of discussion among those interested in the future of health care in the U. S.

Kleinke's book sets forth the reasons why the healthcare system does not function - he is clear and thorough, there is no whitewash. The dissection of healthcare system is especially cleansing and refreshing to readers who are tired of hearing about lack of access to adequate healthcare - Oxymorons explains the "why" by peeling the onion of the system to reveal the rotten root. In

addition, Kleinke puts together a plan to revise the system and put therapeutic choice back in the hands of the physician and the patient, rather than the treatment-phobic payer. So often in the media we hear about overpriced pharmaceuticals and the cost of healthcare innovation. What we do not hear about is the plight of the physician who is hamstrung by payers from making therapeutic choices for patients. We hear about patients who look up new technologies on the internet for their conditions, but we do not hear about the payers who restrict patient access to innovation and science. Further, we do not hear about how payers purposefully shun simple and cost-effective electronic solutions to covering medically necessary treatment. As a result, payers are in the driver's seat to process claims inefficiently, make ad hoc coverage decisions, and make untimely and inappropriate payments to physicians and patients. Why don't we hear about these issues in the media? Why aren't electronic solutions embraced by the payer to increase the overall health of Americans while embracing the importance of physician decision-making and patient choice? Kleinke sets forth the rationale for the broken system. Wouldn't it be great if payers actually embraced technology to the benefit of patients and physicians? What would happen if payers empowered innovations in medicine for patients to the benefit of the practice of medicine and science, rather than hiding from electronic solutions for the sake of making a few more bucks on the stock market? What would happen if a system existed in which patients could make informed choices about their plans, rather than the employer, to control their own treatment plans in conjunction with their physicians? Kleinke lifts the veil for all to see, and what is there is not pretty, it's broken and counter-intuitive. While some readers might call this a negative book, many readers will find this a refreshing look at what is really there. It is thought-provoking and interesting, not just a sound byte to make everyone feel good. *Oxymorons* is an excellent follow-up to Kleinke's first book: "Bleeding Edge", a must read for anyone interested in learning more about healthcare and the economics of the system.

*Oxymorons* is the first book that dares to look at the whole mess that is the US health care system without a political or business agenda. The author explains exactly why the system is stuck in political and economic gridlock, and how this gridlock actually benefits all those denouncing it the loudest - the health insurance companies, consultants, lawyers, and various business schemers who make money on the system's complexity and dysfunction. After discrediting so much of the nonsense that pundits and policy types like to generate about health care using real data, *Oxymorons* then dares to put forth a concise and simple plan for how the federal government and a non-governmental non-partisan health benefits task force (notably not any one state government or

any newfangled managed care scheme) can change a few simple rules, establish some actual standards, and flush out a lot of the waste that defines the non-system of health care in the US. Kudos to the author for calling it like he sees it, and still having the guts to propose a real solution.

Oxymorons represents perceptions of the healthcare system at the time the book was written. When Kleinke wrote Bleeding Edge, many healthcare leaders felt that managed care was going to rejuvenate the healthcare system in the US. Oxymorons reflects the failure of managed care to deliver a fix to the system and the disappointment that everyone felt at the time. It should be read as a reflective work which chronicles a point in time. As such, it delivers an interesting perspective and one that is helpful to remember as we track the evolution of healthcare in the US.

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