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The US Healthcare System

In June 2003, a landmark study in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that American adults received appropriate medical treatment only 55% of the time (or just about once on every two occasions).

In the years since, a private organisation called The Commonwealth Fund has routinely conducted an X-Ray of expert perspectives about the US healthcare system. In the form of a survey of a cross-section of opinion leaders, its views are held in high regard not only by healthcare professionals but also by lawmakers and the media. The Fund is chaired by Dr. Samuel O. Thier, a respected professor at Harvard Medical School and former president of Partners Healthcare System and the Institute of Medicine.

The latest (11th) Commonwealth Fund Health Care Opinion Leaders Survey finds that the current US health system is neither achieving, and moreover, does not seem to be designed to encourage high quality.

By and large, Europeans tend to look wistfully across the Atlantic to the US as The Place for Healthcare Technology. Ironically, some of the Survey's key conclusions seem to suggest that Americans, on their part, are looking at Europe in just such a light.

Responses to the Commonwealth Fund Survey indicate strong support for a greater leadership role by government, the creation of a new public-private entity to boost quality, reforms in payment mechanisms for healthcare providers as well as steps to promote medical homes – in other words, various aspects of what passes for the archetypal continental European model.

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