

Dying to Be Seen: The Race to Save Medicare in Canada

Cathy MacNeil

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Dying to Be Seen is a fascinating study of the social science behind health care; it issues an urgent plea to save Canada's medical safety net.

In *Dying to Be Seen*, emergency room nurse Cathy MacNeil analyzes Canada's struggling publicly funded health-care system.

Comparing the state of health care in Canada to that of a critical patient who has just been wheeled into the emergency room, this clear-minded, message-driven book conveys a sense of urgency. It backs this up with a history of the fight to bring affordable health care to Canadians, beginning in the 1920s. It shows how the system came to fruition in the postwar era and then covers its economic turmoil in recent years. Such lessons are detailed and authoritative, and they are supported by personable anecdotes to maintain interest.

The book also compares and contrasts Canada's health-care system with that of the US to argue that privatization does not control costs. It uses pertinent examples of both systems at work, as with its considerations of blood donation and of the drugs used to treat diabetes. The rising cost of health care becomes focal; MacNeil references Noam Chomsky and John Dewey in discussing the pernicious effects of capitalism and the shortcomings of a free market. The effects of different economic systems on the affordability of drugs and health care are not always obvious, she says; thus, detailed explanations of how these approaches play out in the real world are provided.

MacNeil complements her claims with firsthand accounts from the emergency room, capturing the frustrations of medical staff. The hollow promises of healthcare CEOs and consultants are juxtaposed to the realities that doctors and nurses face as they struggle to make do despite budget cuts and overcrowding. MacNeil recalls being coerced to attend irrelevant corporate seminars on leadership too. A chapter on the effects of COVID-19 on the strained system brings the book into the present; MacNeil presents this as yet another example of how political shortsightedness damaged the Canadian health-care system.

MacNeil's tone is intense yet professional, imparting a sense of urgency with controlled examples. And the book includes a compelling mix of facts, figures, quotations, and citations. It shares detailed policy suggestions to correct the issues it names, ending with a call to action to counter any despair that's taken root.

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MATT BENZING (January 10, 2023)

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