



Where Does It Hurt?: An Entrepreneur's Guide to Fixing Health Care

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A bold new remedy for the sprawling and wasteful health care industry

Where else but the doctor's office do you have to fill out a form on a clipboard? Have you noticed that hospital bills are almost unintelligible, except for the absurdly high dollar amount? Why is it that technology in other industries drives prices down, but in health care it's the reverse? And why, in health care, is the customer so often treated as a mere bystander—and an ignorant one at that?

The same American medical establishment that saves lives and performs wondrous miracles is also a \$2.7 trillion industry in deep dysfunction. And now, with the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), it is called on to extend full benefits to tens of millions of newly insured. You might think that this would leave us with a bleak choice—either to devote more of our national budget to health care or to make do with less of it. But there's another path.

In this provocative book, Jonathan Bush, cofounder and CEO of athenahealth, calls for a revolution in health care to give customers more choices, freedom, power, and information, and at far lower prices. With humor and a tell-it-like-it-is style, he picks up insights and ideas from his days as an ambulance driver in New Orleans, an army medic, and an entrepreneur launching a birthing start-up in San Diego. In struggling to save that dying business, Bush's team created a software program that eventually became athenahealth, a cloud-based services company that handles electronic medical records, billing, and patient communications for more than fifty thousand medical providers nationwide.

Bush calls for disruption of the status quo through new business models, new payment models, and new technologies that give patients more control of their care and enhance the physician-patient experience. He shows how this is already happening. From birthing centers in Florida to urgent care centers in West Virginia, upstarts are disrupting health care by focusing on efficiency, innovation, and customer service. Bush offers a vision and plan for change while bringing a breakthrough perspective to the debates surrounding Obamacare.

You'll learn how:

- Well-intended government regulations prop up overpriced incumbents and slow the pace of innovation.
- Focused, profit-driven disrupters are chipping away at the dominance of hospitals by offering routine procedures at lower cost.
- Scrappy digital start-ups are equipping providers and patients with new apps and technologies to access medical data and take control of care.
- Making informed choices about the care we receive and pay for will enable a more humane and satisfying health care system to emerge.

Bush's plan calls for Americans not only to demand more from providers but also to accept more responsibility for our health, to weigh risks and make hard choices—in short, to take back control of an industry that is central to our lives and our economy.

Where Does It Hurt?: An Entrepreneur's Guide to Fixing Health Care Details

Date : Published May 15th 2014 by Portfolio

ISBN : 9781591846772

Author : Jonathan Bush

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Health, Health Care, Nonfiction, Business, Medicine

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Frank Capria says

This is a very well written analysis of the issues making American healthcare too expensive, too impersonal, and an overall customer experience disaster. The style is crisp and conversational, and the book is well researched.

My only concern is Bush's absolute, dogmatic belief that the free market can fix all the ills of the system. Firstly, an efficient market depends on rational actors. People simply won't be coolly analytic when it's their health they are deciding on.

The only other significant miss in this book is that he never explains how deregulating healthcare will not lead to the same disaster that deregulating airlines and banks did. The industry is hurt as likely as others to consolidate into an oligopoly to maintain the status quo. (In fairness Bush spends considerable time discussing consolidation, but he does not write of deregulated consolidation and its ability to stifle innovation and throw up high barriers to entry.

Finally he doesn't address the role ever increasing income disparity in the US will play in the deregulated, transparent healthcare market he envisions. As I see it, health can descend into the disaster that is domestic air travel. A pretty damn good experience for the wealthy, but absolute misery for the rest of us. How will the hospital not devolve into the 90/10 divide that is the typical US flight with 30% of the crew fawning over 10% of the passengers, and leaving the 90% in squalid conditions?

Though my vision of the ideal future lies somewhat to the left of Bush's, I highly recommend this book. It starts a discussion that is long overdue in America. I also recommend watching Bush's TED Talk on URQS and large research hospitals prior to reading the book to get a sense of where the author is coming from. I also wish this book was mandatory for medical students.

Joel says

Easy to read, right in so many ways, but wrong in the market fixes all conclusion.

Harikrishna says

The author has no doubts about his vision for healthcare - he suggests more competition and less governmental influence. "Greed is Good" echoes bush; effective healthcare can only be made possible by letting healthcare - a nearly monopolized business into something like a restaurant business, where providers fight each other out for bringing in more patients to their enterprises by gaining that extra edge over others - cutting costs, offering better services. He also suggests that hospitals have to specialize in one service and master it, rather than providing a bunch of services. Just as you can get sell better bicycles in a specialized store rather than in a shopping mall or a hypermarket. Even though his examples are anecdotal, his reasoning seems to be convincing. These ideas are radical for someone like me ; whose experience with Indian hospital

system has led to dissatisfaction and lack of faith in hospitals and medical care providers.

Jonathan outlines his career and proves that his money is where his mouth is, Athenahealth estimated at a billion dollars, is a cloud service and record management company for providers that according to him is poised to disrupt healthcare by backing new entrepreneurs in this field. Jonathan's wit and humor makes the book an easy read as compared to the other healthcare books that I'm struggling to finish. A good read for anyone dipping their feet into the business of healthcare.

Dennis says

Some worthwhile ideas, but it takes some digging to get to them. Also, if you're going to hire a writer to write your book for you, you should probably find one who knows the difference between "regime" and "regimen".

Arun Croll says

Relevant--but far from essential--reading for health professionals and interested patients.

The premise of the book is that healthcare should be disrupted by innovative technologies and competition-oriented business practices. When clinics and hospitals operate like normal businesses, then only the most efficient and cost effective medical providers will survive--to the benefit of the patient. And everybody else.

This vision of healthcare is essentially a free-market utopian fantasy applied to the most high-stakes industry.

This idea might sound obvious or dangerous, depending on your political temperament. Either way, it's interesting food for thought. Occasionally I found myself wanting to be convinced.

After all, there is probably an intelligent case to be made for a hyper-capitalist healthcare system. Just don't look for it in this book. The author does not even analyze the pros and cons of single-payer systems, let alone compare the healthcare systems of other countries to the system that he's proposing.

All in all, I'm glad I read it because it's relevant to my work and provided some new perspectives on the industry--as well as some insight into the branding of Athenahealth.

However, I'm also glad I listened to it on audiobook; I wouldn't have wanted to spend my time reading it in print.

J says

A light read: this book is about inspiration, not implementation. Jonathan can be inspirational when discussing the future of health data. Those sections are the highlights of the book. Unfortunately, he's not so inspirational when making shallow analogies to argue that minimally-regulated capitalism will solve all health care cost problems. Wish he'd talked more about technology and technology-specific policy.

Dave says

A really eye opening perspective on what is at stake in considering the different philosophies on interoperability in healthcare IT. Also a good commentary on the need for disruption in an industry that consumes almost one out of five dollars generated in the country's GDP and how the industry can better foster a climate of innovation.

Brandy says

Interesting read on the business of healthcare.

Seth Green says

I sometimes read books that reinforce my beliefs rather than expanding my horizons and this was one of those times but this book didn't tell its story that well

Jennifer says

It's pretty much common knowledge that America's health care has needed help for a long time, and that the new "ObamaCare" has serious problems of its own. A lot of opinions have been tossed around, but not too many solutions. That's where Jonathan Bush comes in. As cofounder and CEO of athenahealth, a medical billing and health care management company, he has a lot of faith in the ability of entrepreneurs to find innovative solutions to our health care problems. With a less regulated, more competitive, and technology-friendly health care "system," we could be on our way to greater efficiency, lower costs, and more satisfied customers...er, patients. To prove his point, Bush provides a number of recommendations of his own in *Where Does It Hurt? An Entrepreneur's Guide to Fixing Health Care* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2014) written with Stephen Baker.

There are some "free-market" proposals, which could be expected. There are some personal antidotes, most which I found either boring or irrelevant. And Bush constantly name-drops while simultaneously trying to disassociate himself from the politics of his presidential relations. But what you want to know about is the meat of this book: essentially a brain-storming session, taken down in dictation and published. Not really impressive. Some of Bush's ideas need to have more details fleshed out before we can reasonably ask if they're worth implementing. Others strike me as inherently unwise. With all of the relatively-recent scandal and crises associated with Fannie Mae, how anyone can seriously suggest forming the same thing for insurance start-ups without addressing any of the easily foreseeable problems it would face? And the suggestion that quickly-trained Army medics are qualified to take over much of the domain of fully-trained physicians seemed to address health care cost at the expense of health care quality. To be honest, it sounded like veteran Army medic Bush may be a bit sore about having his medical school dreams cut short when he didn't have what it takes to pass organic chemistry.

While I wasn't impressed with the authors' ideas, that's not to dismiss the entire book. *Where Does It Hurt?* is a guide for entrepreneurs, not a step-by-step instruction manual. Bush's enthusiasm is contagious, and the success stories he tells are inspiring. I expect wheels to start turning in the minds of creative young readers, who might come up with some viable solutions. Bush really had any himself, I suppose he would be trying to start those businesses rather than "giving it away" by writing a popular book.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book as a First Reads giveaway winner on GoodReads.com. There was no obligation to write a review.

Jack says

Untimely to be reading Jonathan Bush's book given his recent less-than-graceful exit from the healthcare big stage, but nonetheless this book was worth reading.

Bush's famous vocalness and lack of filter comes through in the prose, and his unabashed pro laissez faire capitalist streak can come across as distasteful if not inappropriate at times on a topic as serious as healthcare, but his perspective is often interesting and insightful.

First of all, for the longest time I felt that healthcare technology suffered from being suffocated by proprietary data formats (see Epic and Cerner), and could use an injection of the open-source ethic from the technology world. My thought was always that someone like Google should buy up an EMR and establish that open-source data standard. Little did I know, AthenaHealth under Bush and colleagues have been fighting that good fight all this time. It's nice to see such a clarion voice argue for open data, patient ownership of data, and greater data fungibility and liquidity. Bush believes, as I do, when health data becomes LIQUID while still remaining secure (no easy task I admit), it will open the floodgates towards innovative use of data, and move through what he describes as the 3 "waves": 1 - data helping healthcare orgs running businesses more efficiently (already starting to happen), 2 - data helping with diagnoses and treatment, the promise of PHM, and 3 - personalized medicine.

His central thesis is that healthcare needs more capitalism and less regulation: if we open up the demand curve sensitivity that laws shield healthcare services from, then we will get better innovation and outcomes in healthcare. The argument is complex, and at times I agree that more market forces will help, but other times he goes too far - naked market forces for insurance policies may unleash more chaos than he is describing, we can get adverse selections of healthy people into bare bones plans, and the sick into toxic risk pools, defeating the point of health insurance to begin with...

He has various other arguments that I like, insight and clearly laid out, with compelling anecdotes sprinkled in.

For example, Bush believes in healthcare we often overshoot the mark and try to make new things too fully formed. He thinks there is a huge "vast middle class soft belly" of healthcare org tech budgets running the in the thousands or tens of thousands, for which there is infinite potential for primitive innovation, technology solutions that solve simple problems in simple ways.

One other argument I like is that at a time in which docs (especially PCPs) are being swallowed up so at lightspeed by hospitals systems, they actually more leverage than they recognize, being at the heart of the next innovations to happen, since they will need to be at the heart of effective technology-enabled care

management and care coordination, AND the fact that they still dictate referral flows. Maybe when they collectively realize this, this will impact the shape of the physician corporate landscape, and we'll see a resurgence of powerful medical groups once again counterbalancing the hospital systems, which Bush deems dinosaurs looking up at meteors.

Quharrison says

Solid primer on the Health Tech industry

I would recommend this book to anyone who would want to learn more about the current state of health care and technology. Busch does a great job of breaking down how everyone plays a part in this overly complicated system and periodically plugs Athena Health.

Jim Thomas says

This book really bugged me. After realizing that it was written by a member of the Texas Bush clan - and a capitalist entrepreneur to boot - I almost decided to not read it any further. However, thankfully it turns out, Jonathan made me think of other ways to (maybe) resolve America's current healthcare disaster without throwing out the entire thing and starting over from scratch. As much as I like the idea of redoing the entire healthcare system in this country, I don't think it is even remotely possible or if attempted in our current political environment it might even end up worse than what we have now.

Jonathan's ideas of using what is good about a true free-enterprise system - unencumbered by excess regulations and corporate entrapment - has a lot going for it. Try as I might I could not shoot too many holes in his ideas. Many seem quite possible and could be achieved in a reasonable time frame. Maybe instead of trying to design a full replacement for something as complex as a large nation's healthcare system, we can let small, flexible entrepreneurs chip away at the worst excesses of the current system. As long as we don't allow them to become just new mega-corporate monsters that manage to capture entire markets and government leadership (and finally decide that personal medical data and records belong to the patients and nobody else without permission) we can slowly and carefully return something as important as healthcare to the needs of the people and not to the profit takers and "shareholders".

Ethan says

Jonathan Bush, the irrepressible CEO and Co-founder of software company athenahealth, has published an engaging professional memoir mixed with a guide to opportunities for health care entrepreneurs.

Where Does It Hurt? An Entrepreneur's Guide to Fixing Health Care is not the much-needed conservative rebuttal to Zeke Emanuel's *Reinventing American Health Care* that I half-expected. Policy-minded readers might be disappointed - in fact Bush quite practically focuses on the areas of health care that can be improved without relying on policy changes - but health care entrepreneurs and investors will greatly appreciate Bush's observations and exhortations.

(My reactions to Emanuel's generally excellent book are [here](#))

To the first area, Bush wears his family lineage lightly. He acknowledges being “nursed at the right breast” and mentions his uncle George and cousin George, but reflects an independent, even iconoclastic point of view. The usual entrepreneurial narrative is here - starting a now-major software company in his basement, radically changing business models midstream, holding meetings with large customers and potential employees who had no idea just how shaky the early company was. Bush comes across as delighted to have beat the odds to create a meaningful company in health care and genuinely appreciative of the athenahealth employees who built the company. At no point do the personal or professional stories read like a preparation for the political stage.

As I see it, Bush’s anecdotal history of athenahealth, while interesting to those of us who admire the groundbreaking company, is secondary to his perspicacious identification of trends in American health care, how committed entrepreneurs can build big businesses at their intersection, and why health care will improve as a result.

Bush identifies three major themes, implying that businesses that exploit or accelerate these areas are large opportunities in health care entrepreneurship.

1. “Shopping” - i.e., consumerism
2. Hospital specialization
3. Data shared on networks

Bush passionately believes (as do I) that the single best way to simultaneously improve the quality of health care while reducing its cost is to put the individual at the center, specifically to employ a retail model of consumer choice wherever possible. Whether or not you agree that consumers should be in charge of their own health care decisions, or that “shopping” is a model that should be applied to this most critical and expensive service in the US economy, the health care consumerism ship is sailing. Companies and technologies that help consumers make their own decisions - weighing effectiveness of particular treatments vs. their costs, choosing health plans on public or private exchanges, trading convenience over price when filling a prescription - will flourish in the coming years, and our health care system will be the better for it. (Bush repeats the oft-cited but irrefutable example of LASIK eye surgery as a medical procedure that has become extraordinarily more effective while becoming extraordinarily less expensive - a triumph of the power of “shopping” when unleashed in health care.)

Similarly, hospital specialization might have seemed controversial a few years ago, but seems unavoidable today. The consequences of hospital proliferation and growth are becoming obvious, as increasing numbers of regional hospitals close. It makes sense - not every hospital can be generally great at every kind of treatment. So they’ll start to focus on what the areas where they excel, and not offer services where they don’t. This trend implies that hospitals will need to go outside their immediate geographic areas for customers - and that as these hospitals look more broadly, consumers around the country will start to have better access to the best specialists. Companies that can help hospitals navigate this trend will do well - whether helping hospitals market to new consumers or transport them, helping employers negotiate with the best facilities for their employees’ care, or helping consumers discover where the best care is (and is not!) available.

Athenahealth itself was a pioneer in software provided “in the cloud” - connected to doctor’s offices and insurers via the Internet, rather than being installed on customers’ own servers. Of course interoperable software systems and data exchange have become the norm across all industries - generally health care sadly lags, but is coming along. Closed systems like that offered by Epic, the dominant vendor of hospital software, will go the way of the dodo. Entrepreneurs will profit - and health care will improve - by helping

data flow more easily, even to competitors' software; by empowering consumers to own, control, and share their own health care data; by embracing a highly distributed, interconnected world.

Like Jonathan Bush himself, *Where Does It Hurt?* is energetic, scattershot, adamant, and ultimately optimistic. It's worth reading by anyone interested in how technology-driven contemporary business models can improve the business of American health care.

N.B.: it's not entirely clear if this book is a personal exposition or corporate document - the copyright is credited to athenahealth, with co-writing credit given Stephen Baker, apparently an athenhealth employee (several other athenahealth employees are also thanked for their contributions) - but its excited, ad hoc style certainly reflects Bush's real world persona.

Sharron says

The introduction is so impressive, it's very engaging. The rest of the book doesn't hold up. By the time you get towards the end he has ridiculous suggestions. He proves to be out of touch with the realities of people's financial choices.
