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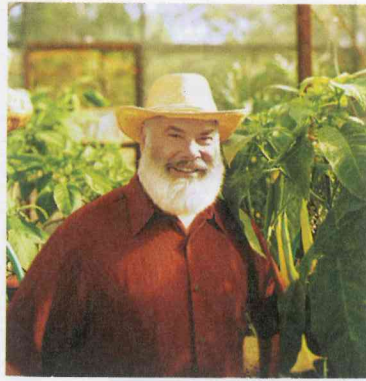


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REFORMING HEALTH CARE

Q+A

with ANDREW WEIL, M.D.



Nearly 15 years ago, Andrew Weil, M.D., introduced readers to what was then a new concept: integrative medicine, the combination of conventional and alternative approaches to promote healing. Now the Tucson, Arizona-based physician has turned his sights to health-care reform. In February 2009, he joined physicians Mark Hyman, Mehmet Oz, and Dean Ornish in testifying before Congress on the role that integrative medicine can play. In his new book, *Why Our Health Matters*, Weil advocates a transformation in how we pay for health care and in what that care consists of. Here, he tells us why—and how—the system must change.

What prompted you to write this book?

I think it's a logical conclusion of the work I've been doing for the past 30 years in terms of supporting patients and promoting integrative medicine. Health care and medicine are in a desperate condition, and no one seems to be addressing the root problems or taking the right steps needed for change.

"Integrative medicine uses low-tech, 'high-touch' approaches to treatment. More importantly, it helps teach people how to not get sick in the first place."

Like everyone else, I'm frustrated. I want to inspire people to realize that things can change.

You cite surprising myths in your book, including that the U.S. has the world's best health care. Why do these myths exist?

I think they help us feel comfortable and avoid facing the ugly truths about health care in this country. But the reality is, we don't have the best care in the world. We actually rank 37th out of 40, about the same as Slovenia.

But we have such amazing technology at our fingertips. Shouldn't that improve care?

We tend to be dazzled by new technology—and medical technology is no different. But it doesn't necessarily result in better care. Take MRI and CT scans: They can help diagnose some conditions, but too often they fail to reveal anything, and the radiation exposure and expense are not justifiable. Yet they're recommended for everything from knee pain to headaches. Another reason these types of tests are overused? Money. Insurance companies tend to reimburse for expensive tests, but not always for preventive measures.

What role does prevention play in reform?

A huge role. I believe integrative medicine is the only practical way to contain health-care costs. It uses low-tech, "high-touch" approaches to treatment. More importantly, it helps teach people how to not get sick in the first place.

What do you hope your readers learn?

I hope it makes them angry, if they aren't already. And I hope it inspires them to fight for change. I list action steps in the book—things anyone can do, from writing to legislators to starting grassroots organizations. I feel very passionate about this issue, and I want my readers to feel that way, too.

—Jessica Cerretani

A Brighter Smile

Whitening your teeth with at-home bleaching kits could wear down your tooth enamel, a recent Ohio State University study shows. After testing five brand-name tooth-whiteners, scientists found that the products weakened enamel and reduced the tooth's resilience to applied force. Tested products included whitening strips as well as trays filled with whitening gel.

Bleach works by attacking pigment molecules in the enamel. For pearly whites without the bleach, try these teeth-whitening techniques recommended by Terecita Dean, D.D.S., holistic dentist at the Wellness Center of Alameda, in California.

+ Clean out your mouth immediately after sipping notorious teeth-stainers like coffee, tea, red wine, and soda. If you can't brush right away, drink water to rinse your teeth.

+ Cut back on acid-forming foods, such as meat, dairy products, and sweets. "Acidity promotes plaque build-up," explains Dean. "Once that plaque has accumulated, it's easier for food and beverages to stick and stain your teeth." Increasing your intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can also keep your system in balance.

+ Choose a toothpaste made with naturally whitening baking soda, or simply sprinkle baking soda onto your brush before cleaning your teeth.

+ Once daily, follow up your brushing by rinsing your mouth with a half-cup of water mixed with a tablespoon of three percent hydrogen-peroxide solution. A natural tooth-whitener, hydrogen peroxide can also knock out plaque-causing bacteria. Just be careful not to swallow the peroxide. —E.B.