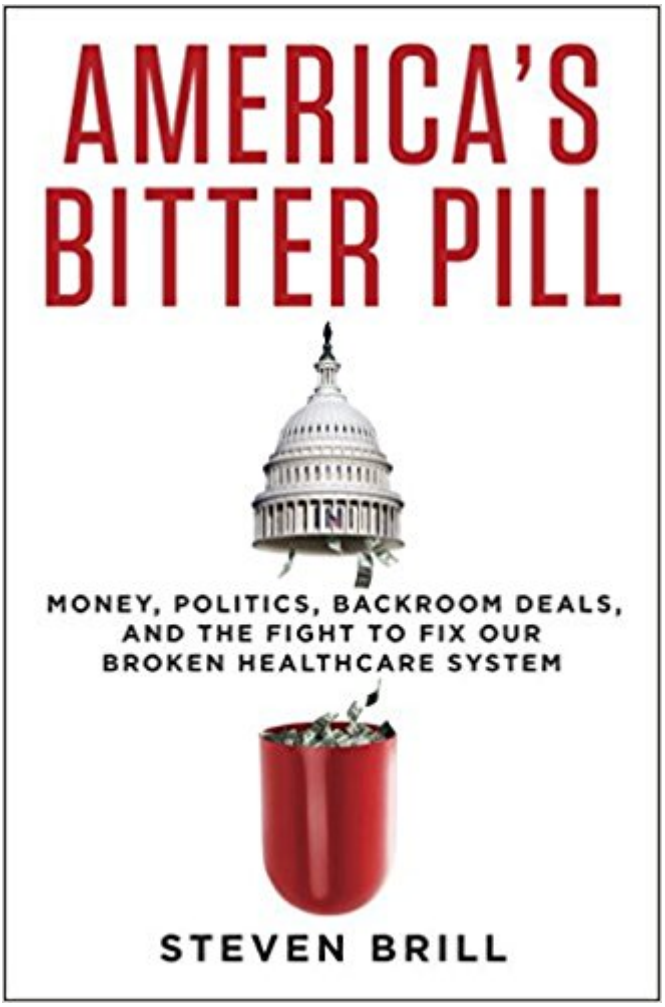
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America's Bitter Pill: Money, Politics, Back-Room Deals, And The Fight To Fix Our Broken Healthcare System



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Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Ã¢â ¬Â¢ A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK Ã¢â ¬Â¢Ã Â AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bitter Pill is Steven BrillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s acclaimed book on how the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, was written, how it is being implemented, and, most important, how it is changingÃ¢â ¬â •and failing to changeÃ¢â ¬â •the rampant abuses in the healthcare industry. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a fly-on-the-wall account of the titanic fight to pass a 961-page law aimed at fixing AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s largest, most dysfunctional industry. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a penetrating chronicle of how the profiteering that Brill first identified in his trailblazing Time magazine cover story continues, despite Obamacare. And it is the first complete, inside account of how President Obama persevered to push through the law, but then failed to deal with the staff incompetence and turf wars that crippled its implementation. Ã Â But by chance AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bitter Pill ends up being much moreÃ¢â ¬â •because as Brill was completing this book, he had to undergo urgent open-heart surgery. Thus, this also becomes the story of how one patient who thinks he knows everything about healthcare Ã¢â ¬Å“policyÃ¢â ¬Â• rethinks it from a hospital gurneyÃ¢â ¬â •and combines that insight with his brilliant reporting. The result: a surprising new vision of how we can fix American healthcare so that it stops draining the bank accounts of our families and our businesses, and the federal treasury. Ã Â Praise for AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bitter Pill Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A tour de force . . . a comprehensive and suitably furious guide to the political landscape of American healthcare . . . persuasive, shocking.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“An energetic, picaresque, narrative explanation of much of what has happened in the last seven years of health policy . . . [Brill] has pulled off something extraordinary.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Book Review Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A thunderous indictment of what Brill refers to as the Ã¢â ¬Ëœtoxicity of our profiteer-dominated healthcare system.Ã¢â ¬â„¢ Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Los Angeles Times Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A sweeping and spirited new book [that] chronicles the surprisingly juicy tale of reform.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Daily Beast Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“One of the most important books of our time.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Walter Isaacson Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Superb . . . Brill has achieved the seemingly impossibleÃ¢â ¬â •written an exciting book about the American health system.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Review of Books

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“A tour de force . . . a comprehensive and suitably furious guide to the political landscape of American healthcare . . . persuasive, shocking.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Ã¢â ¬Å“An energetic, picaresque, narrative explanation of much of what has happened in the last seven years of health policy . . . [Steven Brill] has pulled off something extraordinaryÃ¢â ¬â •a thriller about market structure, government organization and billing practices.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Book Review Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A thunderous indictment of what Brill refers to as the Ã¢â ¬Ëœtoxicity of our profiteer-dominated healthcare systemÃ¢â ¬â„¢ . . .Ã Â For its insights into our nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fiscal, psychological and corporeal healthÃ¢â ¬â •and for our own long-term social well-beingÃ¢â ¬â •it is a book that deserves to be read and discussed widely by anyone interested in the politics and policy of healthcare.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Los Angeles TimesÃ¢â ¬Å“A sweeping and spirited new book [that] chronicles the surprisingly juicy tale of reformÃ Â . . . [BrillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] book brims with unconventional insight delivered in prose completely uninfected by the worn out tropes and tired lingo of the Sunday shows.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The Daily BeastÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“This is one of the most important books of our time. Through revealing personal stories, dogged political reporting, and clear analysis, it makes the battle over ObamaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s healthcare plan come alive and shows why it matters. It should be required reading for anyone who cares about our healthcare system.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Walter IsaacsonÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Superb . . . Brill has achieved the seemingly impossibleÃ¢â ¬â •written an exciting book about the American health system.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Review of BooksÃ¢â ¬Å“[An] ambitious new history of the Affordable Care Act.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Malcolm Gladwell, The New YorkerÃ¢â ¬Å“Steven BrillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s new book about the process of passing the Affordable Care Act is so meticulously reported, I found myself surprised by many details of a process I myself was deeply involved in. . . .

Brill has written an outstanding book about the administrationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s efforts to pass Obamacare. Now it is up to the administration to prove him wrong about what the legislation does to the trajectory of health-care costs.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Peter R. Orszag, Bloomberg View
Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“BrillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book performs an admirable job of getting behind the scenes. . . . [A] state-of-the-nation account of the broken U.S. healthcare system and ObamaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s partially successful attempt to heal it.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The NationalÃ¢â ¬Å“A landmark study, filled with brilliant reporting and insights, that shows how government really worksÃ¢â ¬â •or fails to work.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Bob Woodward Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bitter Pill is deeply impressive, an important diagnosis of what America needs to know if weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re ever to develop a healthcare system that is fair, efficient, and effective.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Tom Brokaw
Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“In AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Bitter Pill, Steven Brill brilliantly ties together not only the saga of Obamacare, but also the larger story of our dysfunctional healthcare system and its disastrous impact on both businesses and ordinary Americans. In a gripping narrative, his thorough reporting is made all the more powerful by his own scary experience looking up from a gurney.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Arianna Huffington

Steven Brill has written for The New Yorker, Time, and The New York Times Magazine. A graduate of Yale College and Yale Law School, he also founded and ran Court TV, The American Lawyer magazine, ten regional legal newspapers, and BrillÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Content magazine. Brill was the author of TimeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s March 4, 2013, Special Report Ã¢â ¬Å“Bitter Pill: Why Medical Bills Are Killing Us,Ã¢â ¬Â• for which he won the 2014 National Magazine Award for Public Service. Brill also teaches journalism at Yale, where he founded the Yale Journalism Initiative to encourage and enable talented young people to become journalists. He is married, with three adult children, and lives in New York.

As a doctor in the US, I see the problems inherent in our medical system from the inside every day. This book is not just about Obamacare, but about the sorry state of our health care in general. The author clearly, and often infuriatingly, explains why Obamacare ended up being so ineffectual, limited, and riddled with unintended consequences as a result of all the compromises in favor of special interest groups who made sure a real reform would not be passed.

For any one who is seriously interested in healthcare, it is critical reading, if sometimes heavy going reading. Brill focusses on the history of Obamacare, and in doing so makes it clear that the root of

the U.S. health care problem is political. Healthcare now accounts for one sixth of the US economy, and that means that the money and influence t that can be rallied against any change are formidable. This made the enactment of Obamacare so torturous a process, and explains why the result is a U.S. system that still has profound problems.Another reviewer refers to Bismark's dictum that one should not watch either laws or sausages being made, and the first half of Brill's book demonstrates that -- exhaustively and and times exhaustingly. He shows how it was that, even with a Democratic majority in both houses, lobbyists for special interests (the drug companies, the insurers, the hospitals, the device makers, the patient's groups, and on and on and on) were able to force those in favor of reform to water down proposals, compromise, buy off, and on and on an on. In so doing, I learned a lot about the economics and the power structure of the U.S. health care system, but I also learned more than I probably wanted to know about a few too many individuals. I also learned (or was confirmed in my belief) that within the Obama administration there were major divisions of opinion and major shortages of communication.The second part of the book, on what happened after the legislation was passed, was more interesting -- or perhaps more accurately less exhausting. First, in this part, Brill intersperses the political narrative with stories of individuals who ran into financial catastrophe through illness, and looks at what varioius institutions (mostly hospitals) did to bring these individuals close to financial ruin. Second, his narrative of the failed launch of the Obamacare website is eyeopening -- the launch failed because the project was badly run from its inception, and that reflected bad management by the administration, all the way up to the top. That, however, is followed by the livliest part of the book, in which a "Geek Squad" of mostly private sector techies saves the day. There is a lot in this section to gratify anti-Obama types and anti-govenment types, but only if you read it in isolation from the context. That context is one of "non profit" hospitals with CEO's who earn millions a year, drug companies whose devotion to research is far exceeded by their devotion to their profit margins, and an overall situation in which the consumer of healthcare comes in last.At the end of the book, Brill argues that there is no way that the U.S. healthcare system can be rebuilt from the ground up in a way that would minimize costs and maximize outcomes. That would mean single payer, it would mean Medicare drug price negotiation if not drug price regulation, it would mean serious research on comparative outcomes and costs, and it would mean a whole lot of other violent change to one-sixth of the U.S. economy. That sixth has a very powerful interest in resisting change, while the five-sixths of the economy that would benefit has a more diffuse interest. Granted that, he proposes that perhaps we should consider making the institutions that directly provide more and more U.S, medical care --the hospitals -- into insurers as well as providers. It's an interesting idea that sounds a little like handing the whole

henhouse over to the fox, but it bears discussion. As to Obamacare, Brill concludes that it was a major accomplishment, in that it brought healthcare into the reach of many more Americans. Still, Brill argues that it was essentially tinkering with the jalopy, not putting in a new engine.This book is the best overall summary of the U.S. healthcare situation that I have read in years, which is why five stars. It could have been a better book, better organized and more readable. Still, I think it is one of those books you should read even if it takes effort.

Whether or not you support Obama Care, you must read this book. A brilliant author and reporter, Brill carefully documents how various lobby groups interfered with the legislative process during the drafting of the Affordable Health Care Act. He also discusses his personal medical experiences.The problem with modern health care, the author suggests, is not that "liberals' are trying to socialize health care. Most involved in the legislation appear to have genuinely desired health care for all. But the devil is in the details. As is, Obama Care cannot work.The real issue is cost. How can we adequately insure all Americans when medical costs are skyrocketing? When so-called "nonprofit" hospital reek in billions in profits? When pharmaceutical companies will not make price concessions for groups? When manufacturers of medical devices earn obscene profits? When providers duplicate each others equipment?Here in Pittsburgh, the dominant (and dominating) healthcare provider is UPMC. Its CEO earns $7 million a year. In just six months profits rose by $65 million. In the meantime, even those with Obama care policies either cannot afford the premiums or face enormous co-pays and deductibles. Something must be done.

As Brill details, much of the dysfunction in healthcare can be traced to a single regulatory deficiency: largely because of the influence of the pharmaceutical, hospital and medical device lobbies, the United States does not engage in wholesale rate-setting in the healthcare market (although it does so in a limited fashion for those enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid). Through a price list known as a chargemaster, American hospitals engage in unconscionable gouging ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â • marking up even the most basic products like Tylenol by 100% the retail cost. In some cases, hospitals inflate the price for cancer drugs by 400%. These markups are passed on to insurance companies and, ultimately, to patients.

This is a very informative but unsettling account of how the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare) was created. It includes many of the ways our healthcare system is broken and possible ways to improve it. There is a huge amount of information as to the politics of creating the system. Lots on

the backroom deals needed to keep it from being sabotaged, inclucing deals with drug manufacturer lobbies, hospital lobbies, threats by the Republicans to prevent its passage etc. It ends with a few recommendations for how to move forward although these are not accompanied by a way to deal with the destructive politics involved. I found it very eye opening albeit depressing to learn how watered down it turned out and how much politics played a role in preventing its developing its potential. For me, it has too much detail and was too long, but I guess that detail is needed to prove that the assertions he makes are true. I recommend it.

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