

# Doctors **Are the Third Leading Cause of Death in the US, Causing 250,000 Deaths Every Year**

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by Dr. Barbara Starfield of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health

## **CONSIDER THESE DEATHS PER YEAR:**

**12,000 deaths/year** -----unnecessary surgery

**7,000 deaths/year** -----medication errors in hospitals

**20,000 deaths/year** -----other errors in hospitals

**80,000 deaths/year** -----infections in hospitals

**106,000 deaths/year** -----non-error, negative effects of drugs

**TOTALING TO 250,000 DEATHS PER YEAR FROM MEDICAL CAUSES!!**

This constitutes the third leading cause of death in the United States, after deaths from heart disease and cancer.

That is the same as *THREE JETLINERS CRASHING EVERY SINGLE DAY* with 205 PASSENGERS on board!

**Prevention, not treatment, is the answer. Drugs, surgery and hospitals are rarely the answer to chronic health problems. Facilitating the God-given healing capacity that all of us have is the key.**

**Improving the diet, exercise, and lifestyle are basic.**

**Effective interventions for the underlying emotional and spiritual wounding behind most chronic illness are also important clues to maximizing health and reducing disease.**

**We are pioneers. We are pioneering change in how we look at the medical approach in this country. We are changing the future of health and wellness. We are part of something that will make a huge difference to people everywhere. Be a part of that difference!**

This might be tolerated if it resulted in better health, but does it? Of 13 countries in a recent comparison, the United States ranks an average of 12th (second from the bottom) for 16 available health indicators. More specifically, the ranking of the US on several indicators was:

- 13th (last) for low-birth-weight percentages
- 13th for neonatal mortality and infant mortality overall
- 14th for post-neonatal mortality
- 13th for years of potential life lost (excluding external causes)
- 11th for life expectancy at 1 year for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 15 years for females, 12th for males
- 10th for life expectancy at 40 years for females, 9th for males
- 7th for life expectancy at 65 years for females, 7th for males
- 3rd for life expectancy at 80 years for females, 3rd for males
- 10th for age-adjusted mortality

The poor performance of the US was recently confirmed by a World Health Organization study, which used different data and ranked the United States as 15th among 25 industrialized countries.

There is a perception that the American public "behaves badly" by smoking, drinking, and perpetrating violence." However the data does not support this assertion.

The proportion of females who smoke ranges from 14% in Japan to 41% in Denmark; in the United States, it is 24% (fifth best). For males, the range is from 26% in Sweden to 61% in Japan; it is 28% in the United States (third best).

The US ranks fifth best for alcoholic beverage consumption.

The US has relatively low consumption of animal fats (fifth lowest in men aged 55-64 years in 20 industrialized countries) and the third lowest mean cholesterol concentrations among men aged 50 to 70 years among 13 industrialized countries.

These estimates of death due to error are lower than those in a recent Institutes of Medicine report (and as said if higher estimates are used, deaths due to iatrogenic causes would range from 230,000 to 284,000).

Lack of technology is certainly not a contributing factor to the US's low ranking.

Among 29 countries, the United States is second only to Japan in the availability of magnetic resonance imaging units and computed tomography scanners per million population. Japan, however, ranks highest on health, whereas the US ranks among the lowest.

It is possible that the high use of technology in Japan is limited to diagnostic technology not matched by high rates of treatment, whereas in the US, high use of diagnostic technology may be linked to more treatment.

Supporting this possibility are data showing that the number of employees per bed (full-time equivalents) in the United States is highest among the countries ranked, whereas they are very low in Japan, far lower than can be accounted for by the common practice of having family members rather than hospital staff provide the amenities of hospital care.

Prescription drugs are the fourth leading cause of death in this country. However, this article makes it quite clear that the more powerful number is that doctors are the third leading cause of death in this country killing nearly a quarter million people a year. The only more common causes are cancer and heart disease. This statistic is likely to be seriously underestimated as much of the coding only describes the cause of organ failure and does not address iatrogenic causes at all.

Japan seems to have benefited from recognizing that technology is wonderful, but just because you diagnose something with it, one should not be committed to undergoing treatment in the traditional paradigm. Their health statistics reflect this aspect of their philosophy as much of their treatment is not treatment at all, but loving care rendered in the home.

Care, not treatment, is the answer. Drugs, surgery and hospitals are rarely the answer to chronic health problems. Facilitating the God-given healing capacity that all of us have is the key. Improving the diet, exercise, and lifestyle are basic. Effective interventions for the underlying emotional and spiritual wounding behind most chronic illness are also important clues to maximizing health and reducing disease.

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