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New Faculty Book Tackles the Past and Present of American Healthcare

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Professor of [Political Science](#) Greg Shaw takes on the behemoth question of how to pay for healthcare in the United States [in a new book](#) titled *Medicare and Medicaid: A Reference Handbook* (ABC-CLIO, *Contemporary World Issues*).

Shaw charts the history of Medicare and Medicaid since 1965, examining strengths, shortcomings and major controversies at an introductory level targeted at high school and college students and the general public. The book features Shaw’s own analysis as well as short essays from a number of perspectives, from practitioners to lobbyists to everyday Medicaid users, in order to paint a fuller picture of how our complex healthcare works in theory and practice.

Politics have only added to the complexity of the current healthcare debate, and Shaw hopes that readers will take the time to learn the facts behind partisan programs such as the Affordable Care Act (ACA), colloquially known as Obamacare.

“Partisanship has so swamped the public discourse that many people can’t see the contradiction in themselves when they protest that they hate Obamacare but also appreciate the Medicaid expansion their state has adopted,” said Shaw. “When a person is hell-bent on hating the idea of the ACA and what it signifies for them and they can’t understand the problems the law was designed to address and how those interventions are actually working, we have a serious problem with democracy.”

One problem that the book brings to the forefront is how to pay for nursing homes when so many elderly Americans rely on Medicaid, a program that was never designed to be a main funding source for millions of Americans dependent on long-term nursing care. Many long-term care facilities limit the number of Medicaid patients they accept, and those that do accept Medicaid often struggle financially and are poorer in quality. “Bottom line,” said Shaw, “we need to figure out how to support an aging population, millions of whom will need this type of care before their lives end.”

Figuring out how to solve the current issues with Medicare and Medicaid is beyond any single book; however, Shaw does give a balanced perspective on some popular proposals. The book weighs the pros and cons of Medicare for All, a single-payer option championed by many progressive Democrats, as a quick way to ensure universal coverage but a difficult political battle. In contrast, a public option favored by President Biden and other moderates would be a more gradual step toward a single-payer system that would build on our current, established system.

In the year-and-a-half since Shaw began this project, the book has evolved with politics and the pandemic, a crisis with the potential to shape the long-term contours of public opinion and policy. The aim of his book, however, has stayed constant—bring to light the reality of American healthcare, without the heated debates and partisan divides.

Shaw concluded, “I can’t and don’t expect non-specialist citizens to busy themselves with public policy homework, but it sure would be nice if more people would tone down the heat and turn on the lights.”

