

Viewpoint: US spends huge on cancer medicine but doesn't have a lot to show for it

The aggressive, can-do American approach to health care isn't working when it comes to medicine in general and cancer medicine in particular. [The U.S. spends far more per capita on health care](#), including cancer care, than any other country, but [higher expenditures have not led to longer lives](#). Quite the contrary. Europe, which spends much less on cancer care than the U.S., has lower cancer mortality rates, [according to a 2015 study](#).

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The American approach fosters corruption. According to [a 2019 essay in Stat News](#) by oncologist Vinay Prasad, many cancer specialists accept payments from firms whose drugs they prescribe. This practice, Prasad argues, "leads us to celebrate marginal drugs as if they were game-changers. It leads experts to ignore or downplay flaws and deficits in [cancer](#) clinical trials. It keeps doctors silent about the crushing price of cancer medicines."

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We must recognize the limits of medicine and the healing capacities of our bodies. We must resist tests and treatments that have marginal benefits, at best. We may never cure cancer, which stems from the collision of our complex biology with entropy, the tendency of all systems toward disorder. But if we can curtail our fear and greed, our cancer care will surely improve.

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