

## WHY IS HEALTHCARE A COST AND EDUCATION AN INVESTMENT?

*Our nation seems to have been struggling for years to uncover an effective model for delivering the healthcare services we need. Reading the following thought-provoking perspective prompted me to consider that if the cost of wellness could be re-structured as an investment – rather than an expense – revolutionary solutions might be found.*

*Richard Wells, founder and principal of The Wellynn Group in Bala Cynwyd, drafted the following perspective. Wells' thinking is shaped by decades of experience working in the Healthcare Industry ([www.thewellynngroup.com](http://www.thewellynngroup.com).) We thank him for his insights.*

Having recently completed the college selection process with my eldest daughter, I started to wonder about a stark contrast in our country's attitudes toward higher education and healthcare. Both are stunningly expensive, and yet every year, millions of parents fight for the privilege of handing over something approaching \$200,000 or more (of either their own or borrowed money) so their son or daughter can earn an undergraduate degree.

For healthcare, however, it seems no one wants to pay anything. Unions strike when co-pays increase from \$20 to \$25. Corporate CEOs rail that the cost of healthcare puts the US at a competitive disadvantage worldwide. Presidential candidates vow to "control the cost" of healthcare, but when these same candidates mention higher education, they usually talk about "helping families afford" college. There are significant differences in those word choices.

This difference in attitude toward the cost of higher education versus the cost of healthcare doesn't make sense. Both industries are vitally important, supplying jobs, generating spending, and driving innovations that underpin our national economy. Both fulfill an insuppressible human need for self-fulfillment, economic well-being, and happiness. Advances in healthcare and the broad reach of higher education are at the root of America's position as the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world.

And yet, when I tell friends and neighbors that I'm going to spend a God-awful amount of money to send my daughter to the University of Notre Dame, they slap me on the back and say congratulations. If I were to tell them I had to spend almost \$50,000 a year

for the next four years to keep my child healthy, I would probably get comments about the unfairness of it all.

Why do we embrace (or at least tolerate) our spending on higher education, while we complain bitterly about healthcare costs and consider them a “crisis?” One answer lies in the fact that most people understand education as an investment in the individual, his or her future success, and the growth of our nation. Many studies have shown the improved earning potential of adults with college degrees versus those without. Parents are willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on their children’s higher education because we know that money will help make our children more successful, prepare them for meaningful careers, and create well-rounded, enlightened, tax-paying citizens. As a nation, our investment in education pays incredible dividends.

When is the last time you felt that way about paying for a doctor visit? And yet, good health is just as important as a good education to developing an individual’s potential as a citizen, worker, and taxpayer. Indeed, one could argue healthcare is even more important, to the extent that it is hard to learn if you are in poor health.

We need to change our thinking about healthcare as simply a cost to be “controlled,” and start thinking about healthcare spending for what it really is: one of the best investments our nation can make in ourselves and our future. I am not arguing that our current healthcare spending is necessarily efficient, or that we could not do a better job of allocating where we spend healthcare dollars. When millions of Americans go without primary care, for example, you have to wonder why we spend so much on high tech toys like surgical robots, or why doctors and hospitals must spend billions in “defensive medicine” solely to protect themselves from claims of malpractice.

I am suggesting that changing our nation’s mental model about healthcare spending might help generate new and innovative ideas about how to get the most out of the dollars we spend. In the long run, spending on healthcare, like spending on education, is not just a cost. It pays dividends to us as individuals and as a nation. It should be supported.

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