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Affordable Health Care—in a Book

Publishers keep up with the burgeoning of new approaches to health care and the need for fresh information

By Natalie Danford | Aug 09, 2013

With last month's attempt by Republicans—their 40th—to repeal the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) having come to naught, the health care industry in the United States is bracing for change, though what form that change will take remains up unknown, at least in the minds of most consumers. And no wonder: conflicting information abounds. In July, the New York Times reported that insurance regulators in New York state estimated health insurance costs for residents who buy individual policies will be cut in half in 2014 under the new law.

The New Republic reported on much the same situation in California. But state governments in Florida and Georgia are predicting sharp increases in insurance costs for their residents. Who can blame Americans for being flummoxed? A May CNN poll showed that 54% of Americans opposed the law, but more than half of those said they opposed the law because it didn't go far enough. As the nation waits to see how it will shake out, all eyes in health care are trained expectantly on Washington. Publishers of health-related books, too, are trying to gauge what effect the new law will have and, more importantly for their purposes, what kinds of books it may encourage consumers to seek out in the future.

 Craig Panner, editorial director of the medical division at Oxford University Press, says, “As we begin to prepare for the Affordable Care Act, publishers recognize the importance of, and the need for, high-quality consumer education material. Consumers want to be informed and prepared for their health care needs. Many of us have a fear of doctors and the uncertainty of the diagnosis. Combined with the change in health care coverage and what we are afforded, consumers want to be informed more now than ever before. And, yes, there are vast amounts of information freely available on the Web, yet much of it has not been vetted, the information is often confusing and possibly even misleading, and, more importantly, the information leads to ‘cyberchondria’—self-diagnosis of disorders. We’re aiming to arm readers with the information they need.” Upcoming consumer titles from the house include *Navigating the Complexities of Stroke* (Aug.) by Louis R. Caplan. But Oxford University Press is also the publisher of titles specifically targeted at health care providers, such as the recently

published *The Intelligent Clinician's Guide to the DSM-5™* and last year's "How Many More Questions?": Techniques for Clinical Interviews of Young Medically Ill Children by Rochelle Caplan and Brenda Bursch. Panner adds, "As society takes advantage of the Affordable Care Act, physicians need the tools to meet the needs of their patients. By working with experienced clinicians, publishers can provide the tools necessary for effective patient-clinician interaction."

For those looking for historical background on the Affordable Care Act, SUNY Press has a 2012 paperback titled *Fighting for Our Health: The Epic Battle to Make Health Care a Right in the United States* by Richard Kirsch, published in cooperation with Rockefeller Institute Press. And in April of next year, Lynne Rienner Publishers will publish *Insuring Children's Health: Contentious Politics and Public Policy* by Alice Sardell.

"Readers seem to gravitate toward books on particular illnesses or issues, such as depression, diabetes, or Alzheimer's, but books on the health care system in general also see brisk sales," says Rowman & Littlefield executive editor Suzanne Staszak-Silva. "Consumers are hoping to understand both the state of our health care system and how it will change moving forward. Parents are also interested in learning more about the health of their children in terms of issues they may be facing and how families can address them and still focus on overall family health and well-being." Last month, the house published *Unraveling U.S. Health Care: A Personal Guide* by Roberta E. Winter and *Talking to Your Doctor: A Patient's Guide to Communication in the Exam Room and Beyond* by Zackary Berger. In September, Rowman & Littlefield will publish *Understanding Parkinson's Disease: A Comprehensive Introduction for Patients and Caregivers* by Naheed Ali and *Dosage: A Guiding Principle for Health Communicators* by J. David Johnson. October will see *Hospice Voices: Lessons for Living at the End of Life* by Eric Lindner.

"The most effective form of health care has always been principally about prevention," notes Rudy Shur, president of Square One Publishers. "It has always been about taking personal responsibility for your own health. I don't think any kind of legislation is going to change the fact that people need to get more personally involved when it comes to health. To paraphrase the late President Kennedy, we should not ask how much of our health quality can be managed by our country—we should ask how much of our health we can manage for ourselves. The bloated medical costs in the U.S. result from too many people just handing over the reins on their own health to doctors. There is a difference between seeking a physician's counsel alongside your own best efforts at good health, and just running to doctors in place of any real and practical approach to how you live each and every day of your life." Upcoming Square One titles include *Magnificent Magnesium: Your Essential Key to a Healthy Heart and More* (Nov.) by Dennis Goodman and Morley M. Robbins; *What You Must Know About Memory Loss and How You Can Stop It: A Guide to Proven Techniques and Supplements to Maintain, Strengthen, or Regain Memory* (Nov.) by Pamela Wartian Smith (the fourth in a series); and *Sodium Bicarbonate: Nature's Unique First Aid Remedy* (Jan.) by Mark Sircus.

"The Affordable Care Act certainly has consumers seeking information," says Melisa Duffy, Wiley's associate director of marketing for consumer Dummies guides. "Health care reform means that people are getting more involved with their own medical circumstances—from finding out about how the reforms affect them to advice on living healthier lives as the cost of access to medicine continues to increase. The first wave of consumers we see requesting information are those with

Medicare benefits. Consumers want to know what additional benefits are provided and how they can get these additional benefits. And they want information from a credible source.” The publisher partnered with AARP for the November title *Medicare for Dummies* by Patricia Barry, and in spring 2014 will publish *The Affordable Care Act for Dummies*.

For a little levity, Rodale will publish *Eat Drink Vote: An Illustrated Guide to Food Politics* in September. Marion Nestle, an expert in public health and nutrition, teamed with the Cartoonist Group syndicate to select 250 cartoons on nutrition and health. Rodale editorial director Jennifer Levesque says, “It’s an informative and entertaining way for readers to get to the heart of what can be complicated food policy and health issues.” On a more serious note, in October, breast cancer awareness month, the house will publish *Prevention: The Ultimate Guide to Breast Cancer: Your Essential Resource from Diagnosis to Treatment and Beyond* by Mary L. Gemignani, a surgeon at New York’s Memorial Sloan-Kettering hospital, and the editors at *Prevention* magazine.

At Harmony Books, upcoming titles include *I’m Too Young for This!: The Natural Hormone Solution to Enjoy Perimenopause* (Sept.) by Suzanne Somers and *The Fast Metabolism Diet Cookbook: Eat Even More Food and Lose Even More Weight* (Dec.) by Haylie Pomroy. Heather Jackson, v-p, executive editor for Harmony Books, says, “We don’t have planned books on the topic of the Affordable Care Act at present, but it’s certainly an urgent issue and a pressing concern, especially for the self-employed and the cash-strapped amongst us, of which there are so many. Recently, it was announced in the *New York Times* that New York and other states would see a 50% decrease in the cost of private health insurance. But for families, that still means thousands of dollars each month out of pocket. Seems to me that one of the most affordable acts of self-care around is to grab a book—whether it’s for an escape into a fictionalized land, a romp through history, or to gather needed information about an interest or issue near and dear to your health.”

Alternative and Mainstream

Publishers continue to invest heavily in books on alternative medicine. Avery senior editor Lucia Watson says, “Consumers know now more than ever that conventional medicine doesn’t have all the answers and there are powerful ways they can take charge of their own health.” Avery titles on alternative cures include *Gutbliss: A 10-Day Plan to Ban Bloat, Flush Toxins, and Dump Your Digestive Baggage* (Oct.) by Robynne Chutkan (which Watson describes as “an integrative plan to relieve the symptoms of GI distress many women experience, but most conventional doctors don’t take seriously”) and a fifth edition of *The Coconut Oil Miracle* by naturopathic doctor and nutritionist Bruce Fife, coming in paperback in December.

Inner Traditions continues to offer books on herbalism and other alternative topics. Forthcoming titles include *Adaptogens in Medical Herbalism* (Aug.) by Donald R. Yance. The house’s April title, *The Wild Medicine Solution* by Guido Masé, has almost sold out its first printing and recently was named book of the year by the International Herb Association.

In more alternative news, in March of next year Piatkus Books will publish *Good Medicine: Safe, Natural Ways to Solve Over 70 Common Health Problems* by Patrick Holford (distributed by Trafalgar Square). Piatkus publisher Tim Whiting says, “There is a growing interest in preventing

lifestyle diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, through diet. Of course, those in the know have always been aware of the link between disease and lifestyle, but it's becoming more mainstream.”

In an interesting twist, one longtime publisher of guides to spiritual wellness is beginning to incorporate more books about traditionally defined health (i.e., care for the body rather than care for the mind) into its list. Jan Johnson, publisher of Red Wheel/Weiser Books, Conari Press, Hampton Roads, and Disinformation Books, says, “A few years ago we started getting proposals for books that had mostly to do with our physical health. We'd always published on spiritual health/practice and mental health/self-help/recovery. [Associate publisher] Caroline Pincus and I were talking one day, and a light bulb clicked on—we're getting these proposals because it's all related. Spiritual, mental, and physical health. It kind of sounds like a big 'duh' now, but truly it spurred us to start publishing books like *Migraine: Get Well, Break Your Dependence on Medication, Take Back Your Life* [June] by Sharron Murray, and *Chronic Resilience: 10 Sanity-Saving Tools for Women Coping with the Stress of Illness* [Aug.] by Danea Horn.”

Shambhala Publications has a title that combines the mainstream—it doesn't get more medical establishment than Harvard Medical School—with the alternative: *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi* by Peter Wayne and Mark L. Fuerst. The title, a paperback guide and workbook, has been selling nearly 400 copies a week since its publication in April. **This month, the press publishes *Yoga for a Healthy Lower Back* by Liz Owen and Holly Lebowitz Rossi, as well as *Yoga Critical Alignment* by Gert van Leeuwen.** For its part, Sterling will publish *Natural Solutions for Digestive Health* by Jillian Sarno Teta and Jennette Bessinger, a naturopath and a chef, respectively, in January, as well as *The Medicinal Chef: Eat Your Way to Better Health* by Dale Pinnock in November.

And Da Capo has several forthcoming titles by M.D. authors, such as *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living* by Amit Sood, coming out in January, and *The New Science of Overcoming Arthritis: Prevent or Reverse Your Pain, Discomfort, and Limitations* by Thomas Vangsness, the chief of sports medicine at the University of California's Keck School of Medicine, as well as an orthopedic surgeon, due in November.

What's Next?

Health care publishers, like publishers in every category, are scanning the horizon for new trends. Heather Jackson of Harmony says, “When it comes to trends, diet still is king, but it is awfully crowded and may be due for an unseating by another self-health category. In that space, though, natural plant-based foods—from vegan, to vegetarian, to paleo—are the shelf winners. Our *The Paleo Manifesto: Ancient Wisdom for Lifelong Health* [Sept.] by John Durant is a book that we believe will become the bible of this style of eating, as well as *Brad's Raw Book* [Dec.] by Brad Gruno, for readers wanting to step their way into consuming more fresh plant foods.”

Marian Lizzi, editor-in-chief of Perigee Books, points to “ongoing interest in intermittent fasting, a method that was introduced in Dr. James B. Johnson's *The Alternate-Day Diet*, which Perigee first published in 2009. Back then, the idea was a bit ahead of the curve. We're now updating the book to reflect new research.”

“Rather than dense medical opinions and complex diets, readers are looking for quick fixes that will improve their health but also fit in with a busy lifestyle,” says Lesley O’Mara, managing director, Michael O’Mara Books. “In Latte or Cappuccino? [Oct., distributed by Trafalgar Square], Hilly Janes introduces 125 easy decisions to change your life. For example, should I grab a fruit juice or a smoothie?”

McGraw-Hill is betting on ongoing interest in cerebral health with *The Brain Bible: How to Stay Vital, Productive, and Happy for a Lifetime* by John Arden (Jan.), which offers the latest available information on neuroplasticity and neurogenesis. The author is the director of training for mental health for the Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers in Northern California.

Workman Publishing senior editor Mary Ellen O’Neill says, “We’re looking at the growing trend of self-help books in the space where health and psychology meet. *A Field Guide to Lucid Dreaming* [Sept.] by Dylan Tuccillo, Jared Zeizel, and Thomas Peisel and *Real Happiness at Work* [Dec.] by Sharon Salzberg represent the evergreen interest in taking control of one’s happiness, but the prescriptions draw in the added muscle of the mind—at work and at rest. And there will always be a market for diet and exercise books; we just like to make sure that ours come with promises that are real and research that is valid.” In December, the house will publish *Thinner This Year: A Younger Next Year Book* by Chris Crowley and Jennifer Sacke.

Addicus Books publisher Rod Colvin reports, “Sale of our consumer health books remain strong, especially among titles on chronic conditions. We sell to the trade and are also pleased to report special sales to hospitals, clinics, and organizations. We’ve seen growth in e-book sales—about 30% of our sales are now e-books. In addition to offering our titles as trade paperbacks, we also offer each title in four e-book platforms.” The house will publish *Diabetic Retinopathy—from Diagnosis to Treatment* by David Boyer in September.

Memoirs and narrative nonfiction titles that are not so much how-tos as how-it-was recountings of health care work and experiences in the health care system are also beginning to pop up from various houses. In February of next year, Berkley will publish *Extraordinary Hearts: A Journey of Cardiac Medicine and the Human Spirit*, a trade paperback original, by John Elefteriades, a cardiac surgeon who has treated more than 10,000 patients.

And in January, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt will publish a health-related memoir: *The Answer to the Riddle Is Me* by David Stuart MacLean. The author told his story—of being placed in a mental hospital and eventually discovering that the malaria drug Lariam had caused dramatic memory loss—in abbreviated form on *This American Life*. In this \$25 hardcover, he gives more detail about how in 2002, at age 28, he woke up in a foreign country with no money, no passport, and no memory of who he was or how he had gotten there.

Big Names in Health Launch New Imprints

Ballantine is launching Zinc Ink, a new imprint headed by David Zinczenko—author of the *Eat This, Not That!* series and the CEO, editorial director of Galvanized Brands—with Ballantine publisher Libby McGuire. (Ballantine is also publishing a book that Zinczenko authored, *Eat It to Beat It: The No-Diet Food Lover’s Plan to Put You Back on the Road to Health*, in December.) Zinc Ink will launch this month with *Serve to Win: The 14-Day Gluten-Free Plan for Physical and Mental*

Excellence by #1-ranked Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic, who was diagnosed as gluten intolerant in 2010. The book includes a foreword by William Davis, author of *Wheat Belly: Lose the Wheat, Lose the Weight, and Find Your Path Back to Health*, which, according to Bookscan, has sold more than 400,000 copies in hardcover since it was published by Rodale in 2011.

Ballantine publisher Libby McGuire says, “Zinczenko can bring these connections that he has to other platforms. He’s involved with *Men’s Fitness* and all of the AMI [American Media Inc.] magazines, so he can leverage things there, and then at ABC News he’s a contributing editor. Being able to have a publisher who can highlight his books in both magazines and television is unprecedented.” In the first sign of such synergy, Djokovic will be featured on the cover of *Men’s Fitness*.

The Zinc Ink imprint will publish six–12 titles per year. Upcoming titles include *Sleekify: The Supercharged Bodyweight Workout to Tone and Strengthen and Flatten Your Belly Fast!* by Michael Olajide (Dec.) and the April title *The EveryGirl Diet: How I Learned to Eat Right, Dropped 40 Pounds, and Took Control of My Life—And How You Can Too!* by Extra host Maria Menounos, which has an announced first printing of 50,000 copies.

Skyhorse Publishing recently launched its own new health imprint, Gary Null Publishing, with two books this fall by Null, a longtime radio host and author specializing in alternative medicine and nutrition: *Reboot Your Brain: A Natural Approach to Fighting Memory Loss, Dementia, Alzheimer’s, Brain Aging, and More* (Sept.) and *No More Diabetes: A Complete Guide to Preventing, Treating, and Overcoming Diabetes* (Nov.).

Skyhorse associate publisher Bill Wolfsthal says, “With health books, sometimes the messenger is the message. For decades, Null has railed against processed food and pharmaceutical solutions to widespread health problems. Though controversial, he has millions of fans. Now the American public is becoming more aware of the issues he has talked about since the 1980s. With more books, like *No More Cancer* and *No More Allergies*, scheduled for spring 2014, we are confident that partnering with someone with a distinct voice will set these books apart in a crowded field.”

Q&A with Nancy Hancock, Executive Editor, HarperOne

How do you define a health book? Is this category expanding and/or are the boundaries blurring?

A health book used to be defined as having to do with physical health only, and often covering one specific topic. Our current understanding of health is that everything is connected, so rather than a blurring of these categories, I would call it an integration of these topics.

What do you think the impact of the Internet is on the category?

Obviously, people rely on the Internet for massive amounts of health information. A book presents vetted information focused on a carefully researched topic. Let’s face it: 80,000 words of well-researched material on one concept will allow any reader a better-informed choice. There can be great crossover from the Internet to a book for someone casually researching a subject and discovering that he or she needs to know a lot more. This opens the door to possible partnerships with health Web sites that can provide referrals through guest blogs, advertising, and interviews with authors.

Is there one major trend that stands out to you in this category?

It is an interesting time in health publishing because there is so much information about various choices—that's the trend. Instead of one health topic dominating the bestseller list, we currently see vegan, paleo, cleansing, and well-being all equally sharing the same space. One thing that will always be true about health: a significant breakthrough gets attention.

Where do you see the health category one year from now? Five years?

Health can only get stronger. Readers understand the need to self-educate, and they are passionate about living long, vibrant lives. Led by breakthroughs and discoveries in science, we're really going to see a need for new understanding as our healthy lifespan increases by as much as 20 years in the near future. Books are an essential format for health exploration.