Part I: Welcome to Our World

When Alice visited Wonderland she learned that time was odd. She heard people saying very strange things. She saw that common sense was not very common at all.

We physicians work in a world that is normal to us. However, we know our world appears like Wonderland to many Americans.

A Map
Doctor Time is Odd
Doctor Language is Often Strange
Common Sense is Not So Very Common
A Very Brief Glossary

Chapter 1: What Are My Chances?

Before you begin to improve your health you need to understand what might damage your health in the first place. Misunderstanding risk undermines good health habits and effective self-care. Misunderstanding risk can also be bad for survival.

Misunderstanding risk is bad for survival!
Risk and Health Decisions
Lower than the risk of murder…
“What Are My Chances?”

Postscript: Ways to Get Better Risk Estimates
The Pressure is On Us Not to Get Risk Right

Chapter 2: As Good As It Gets

In the Academy Award movie by this name, Carol (Helen Hunt) wanted to manage her son’s asthma well but lacked timely, humane support to help her become confident. The movie mirrors the real world. People
want to manage their health issues and concerns well ... but usually lack timely, humane support to help them become confident.

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You should now have a reasonable understanding of our health care Wonderland. Now it’s time to put your understanding to the test. (If you HATE TESTS, don’t worry. This brief test is different.)

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Health care is a complex business. People who use health care can easily suffer from its complexity. Those who work in health care usually suffer from the complexity too.

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Perfect Care? Are You Kidding?

Postscript: Americans’ Views About Perfect Care

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Health Care
Access to Health Care and Efficient Health Care
Communication and Coordination
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Chapter 5: Problems Are Made To Solve

The moment we are born, we are solving problems. Poor problem solving is a threat to health and well-being.

Problem-Solving is a Way of Life
Problem-Solving Made Simple
How Does HowsYourHealth Problem Solving Work?
Which Problems Matter Most?
Good Problem-Solvers Can Be Made

Postscript: Adult Problem Solving and Risk,
Getting Teens to Problem Solve

Adult Problem Solving and Risk
Teen Problem Solving
“Up-the-Stair” Actions
When You Have a Problem, Which Stairway Do You Take?
Chapter 6: It’s 100%

Esther is a very successful businesswoman. She enjoys her success and close family. Until recently, health has been an abstract idea and a collection of dull statistics.

Many times in our lives we are all like Esther. We take our health for granted. And then it’s our 100% concern!

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You now have a good understanding of the promise of “same page” care. Now it’s time to help your Doctor make care not just “as good as it gets” but as good as it can be!

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“You should always be careful when reading books about health. Otherwise you might die of a misprint.”

- Mark Twain

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Part I: Welcome to Our World

“Contrariwise, if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn’t, it ain’t.”

Lewis Carroll. Alice In Wonderland
Welcome to Our World

When Alice visited Wonderland she learned that time was odd. She heard people saying very strange things. She saw that common sense was not very common at all.

We physicians work in a world that is normal to us. However, we know our world appears like Wonderland to many Americans.

The purpose of Part I is to help readers better understand the Health Care Wonderland they usually enter several times a year.

A Map

Alice’s journey through Wonderland took her through many strange places that in many ways were also familiar. The map (shown at right) illustrates some of the places you will visit in How’s Your Health? At times they will seem strange; but they will also be very familiar.

So let’s begin...
The Path to Same Page Care

Welcome to Our World

What are My Chances?

Doesn’t Everyone Worry?

It’s Good As It Gets

Inside the Doctor’s Office

Problems Are Made To Solve

It’s 100%

The Next Great Idea?

The Promise

Same Page Care

Part I: Welcome to Our World
Doctor Time is Odd

Over the course of a year, doctor contact time with patients is very small. Despite the small amount of time spent in contact with a patient, doctor actions result in very large expenses. Because a small amount of time can result in very large expenses, any miscommunication can result in a great deal of waste.

The first “pie” diagram below shows how much of our waking time is spent at work, how much time we should exercise, and how much time we spend in contact with a doctor or other health professionals. The second “pie” diagram shows how much of American money is spent on health.

Doctor time is odd is because it is so focused on doing things. If you have a 30 minute appointment with us we will spend only a few minutes listening to you. (Studies show we will usually interrupt you within 22 seconds!)

Most of the time we will be doing tests, writing things down, filling out forms, and talking at you. We don’t spend nearly enough time finding out what matters to you and helping you live with any problems you have.
Doctor Language is Often Strange

Doctors, lawyers, and most professions use a special language. The doctor language is designed to communicate about disease and illness; it is not designed for effective communication with non-professionals; with people like you. Even the sickest person only spends a sliver of time with a doctor. The small amount of time spent with physicians should be very well designed to help people live as healthy a life as they can.

Common Sense is Not So Very Common

In our Wonderland all is not as it seems. Because miscommunication is so common, doctors and their patients are often not on the “same page.” If you have ever sung with a group, you know that you need to be on the same page as everyone else or you will not be singing the same song, not moving to the same beat.

Common sense says that doctors and patients should be on the same page. But our odd doctor time and our strange language often get in the way of “same page” communication.

When we brush our teeth some bacteria enter our blood and are cleared by our body’s defenses.

One spring day a healthy young man brushed his teeth and the bacteria were not cleared from his blood. Instead a small number of bacteria settled on his heart valve and began to multiply.

During the next two months he saw several physicians. He was told he had the flu, to take some cold pills. Meanwhile the bacteria gradually ate through the heart valve.

In the nick of time, a very skilled heart surgeon was able to fix the heart valve. This young man is the son of one of the authors of How’s Your Health?
The story on the previous page illustrates how the health care Wonderland can give us both the worst and best. It can miss simple problems and yet fix horribly difficult problems. American health care can provide incredibly powerful treatments but at a cost that is beyond the reach of more and more Americans.

This young man needed someone to notice that something was really wrong…the “flu” and a fever should not last more than three weeks. He and his doctors needed to be on the same page.

Had they been on the same page, the correct diagnosis and the timely antibiotics would have cured his infected valve. Instead, he needed one of the few super-specialist surgeons (and hundreds of thousands of dollars) to fix the valve.

Don Berwick, a colleague who is at the forefront in trying to improve health care, places in the starkest terms the challenge confronting health professionals: “we are causing harm, and we need to stop it.”

We are as impatient for change as Don Berwick. For this reason we have written How’s Your Health? and created the web-based tools that go with it.

Bookshelves and wastebaskets are full of health titles and health claims screaming for attention. Some are sensational “blame and shame” books that get your attention but do not lead to improvement. Some falsely promise the moon or a new cure.

How’s Your Health? is not going to scream for your attention or promise you the moon. It simply presents a practical method to make health and healthcare better. The method is based on years of research and depends on new technologies that will help you and health professionals get on the “same page.” More importantly, the method will make you more able to manage any health issues or problems.
Chapter 1

What Are My Chances?

Before you begin to improve your health you need to understand what might damage your health in the first place. Misunderstanding risk undermines good health habits and effective self-care. Misunderstanding risk can also be bad for survival.

Misunderstanding risk is bad for survival!

Fear is one of the most important reasons why we have difficulty getting risk right. Most of us have such an instinctive fear of sharks we do not realize that we are many more times more likely to be killed driving to the beach by our car than being attacked by a shark.

Other examples:

When the risk for burglary is 3 chances in 100 in our community, we will think it is ten times higher (30%); and

We overestimate the risk of cancer.

The list at right ranks the risks to Americans from highest to lowest. About 1 in 6000 Americans die in car accidents, about 1 in 80,000 die in fires, and about 1 in 5 million die from lightning strikes.

Car accident deaths seem almost “natural” because they are so familiar. Sharks are unfamiliar and frightening.

Although we are familiar with airplanes and automobiles, many of us believe that riding in a car is safer than flying in a commercial airplane.

Why? The car gives us a sense of control.

In fact, being in a car for just a 30 mile trip is more risky

Which risks are the most common causes of death in the United States?
(Pick the top three.)

- Car Accidents
- Alcohol
- Murder
- Medical Errors
- Food poisoning
- Chartered Flights
- Fires
- Commercial Flights
- Lightning
- Nuclear Industry
- Shark attacks

Answer: They are listed from highest to lowest.

?
Chapter 2

As Good As It Gets

In the Academy Award movie by this name, Carol (Helen Hunt) wanted to manage her son’s asthma well but lacked timely, humane support to help her become confident. The movie mirrors the real world. People want to manage their health issues and concerns well ... but usually lack timely, humane support to help them become confident.

Getting on the Same Page

Recall that only a sliver of our waking hours each year is spent with a doctor or nurse. Nevertheless, we usually need doctors and nurses to accurately identify what is wrong, help us manage bothersome problems, and show us ways to avoid important risks. We want doctors to be on “that page” with us.

The young man with the infected heart valve had no idea that his heart was under attack by bacteria. He depended on health care professionals to listen to him and figure out that he was ill. He depended on them to tell him that a fever should not last a week. Only after it was almost too late did some health professionals get on “his page.”

Health professionals and patients are often not on the “same page.” Lack of good communication can be dangerous and is the most common cause of malpractice claims. Bad communication is also frustrating because it results in rework and misdiagnoses. For example, about 50% of Americans report that their doctor or nurse is unaware of serious emotional problems. Many medications and tests are often ordered before the doctor discovers that emotional problems need to be addressed.

There are many excuses for the lack of “same page” care.

Sorry about...
waits, waste, errors, costs, and miscommunication.

Everything seems to get in the way.