

Book Review

Laser Burn. *Stephen S. Burkhart.* State House Press, Austin, Texas, 1994, 160 pp., \$19.95.

Laser Burn is a novel written by one of our members in an attempt to educate the public through the vehicle of a fast-paced thriller about the destructive changes occurring in the American health care delivery system.



The author feels that health care reform, whether implemented by government mandate or corporate pressure, will only accomplish its goals of cost-containment by rationing or denying care. The main character of *Laser Burn*, Dr. Jack Armstrong, is unable to continue practicing medicine in this new environment, which to him is totally unethical, and he voluntarily expatriates himself and his family to Mexico to set up a world-renowned shoulder arthroscopy practice and research laboratory.

Sonny Mayo, the pilot of Air Force One, dislocates his shoulder in a mishap while landing the President's plane during a trip to promote health care reform. The

pilot needs surgery, and the President promises the press that his pilot will have the best possible team in the United States perform the surgery. Much to the President's dismay, the Surgeon General arranges for Sonny to go to Mexico for Dr. Jack Armstrong to perform the surgery.

Laser Burn is a rapidly moving Grisham-like novel with several subplots, including Dr. Armstrong foiling an attempt to kill the President. It is well written and, hopefully, will have a broad appeal. Health care professionals will certainly identify with the main characters in the book. When Dr. Armstrong is trying to persuade his brother's primary care doctor to order a thallium scan and stress test for this 36-year-old brother who is experiencing chest and epigastric pain, the doctor responds by saying that, "Texacare has stringent medical guidelines for diagnostic testing that the company has developed at great expense to stockholders using computer-generated outcome studies. My diagnostic algorithm does not justify further testing in such a patient." Needless to say, the brother dies of a myocardial infarction, and Dr. Armstrong seeks refuge from an unjust health care system whose bottom line is the almighty dollar rather than quality care.

This novel is thought provoking and timely. It's a positive effort by one of our members to inform and educate the public on the impact of health care reform on their lives.

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