

Social capital as disease prevention

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Increasing demand for healthcare in developed countries raises concerns about the sustainability of spending on healthcare. Building on epidemiological, medical, economic, sociological and psychological research, I argue that a well-being and social capital crisis largely explains rising healthcare demand. There is compelling evidence that increasing dissatisfaction has caused an increase in morbidity and mortality rates in the US. A main policy recommendation is to tackle declining connections and the spread of social isolation in order to increase well-being and health. I review literature suggesting three domains where policies for social capital can be implemented: urban planning, schooling and regulation of advertising. Moreover, a crisis of trust between physicians and patients underlies the increasing phenomenon of defensive medicine that weighs substantially on healthcare spending. Policies aimed at tackling defensive medicine are discussed.