

SOCIETY

Imported Doctors

THE SOURCE: "Evaluating the Quality of Care Provided by Graduates of International Medical Schools" by John J. Norcini, John R. Boulet, W. Dale Dauphinee, Amy Opalek, Ian D. Krantz, and Suzanne T. Anderson, in *Health Affairs*, Aug. 2010.

IF YOU'RE RUSHED TO THE emergency room with a heart attack and your doctor is a graduate of a foreign medical school, are you in good hands? That depends, say John J. Norcini, president and chief executive officer of the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research, and his colleagues. If your doctor is not a U.S. citizen, you should thank your lucky stars. If he or she is American, well, the outlook for you is not quite as rosy.

The authors examined the outcomes of more than 244,000 hospitalizations for heart attacks and

congestive heart failure in Pennsylvania from 2003 to 2006. Of the roughly 6,000 physicians in their study, 25 percent were graduates of foreign medical schools. A quarter of those international graduates were U.S. citizens.

How did the doctors perform? Five percent of the patients who found themselves in the care of a foreign-born physician died, while 5.8 percent of those in the hands of an American educated abroad did. The foreign-born doctors even outperformed their U.S.-educated peers, who lost 5.5 percent of their patients.

The authors speculate that the Americans who studied abroad may have performed worse because they attended particularly bad international schools. Or, since many may have enrolled abroad because they didn't get

into any school in America, they may have simply been less competent.

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Welfare's New Tune

THE SOURCE: "Effects of Prenatal Poverty on Infant Health: State Earned Income Tax Credits and Birth Weight" by Kate W. Strully, David H. Rehkopf, and Ziming Xuan, in *American Sociological Review*, Aug. 2010.

IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE 20th century, federal welfare policy increasingly tied benefits to an individual either having a job or at least making efforts to get one. President Bill Clinton's 1996 welfare reform sealed the deal, but the trend began in earnest with the 1975 enactment of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Unlike old-school entitlement programs such as Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), EITC makes benefits more generous as a recipient's wages increase. (The benefits eventually taper off, stopping at incomes of

EXCERPT

The Calamity of Main Street

Whereas the Bedouin who surveys a hundred miles of empty sand will crave company and can psychologically afford to offer each stranger a warm welcome, his urban contemporaries, at heart no less well meaning or generous, must in order to preserve a modicum of balance live without

any acknowledgment of the millions of human beings eating, sleeping, arguing, copulating, and dying only inches away. Modern society does not help us to put forward our more dignified sides. The public spaces in which we typically encounter others—commuter trains, jostling pavements, shopping malls, escalators, restaurants—conspire to throw up a demeaning picture of our collective identity. It can be hard to keep faith with humanity after a walk down Oxford Street or a transfer at O'Hare.

—ALAIN DE BOTTON, author of the book *A Week at the Airport: A Heathrow Diary*, in *Harper's* (Aug. 2010)

about \$40,000 for a single parent with two children.) The idea is to make work more worthwhile by helping recipients pay for transportation, childcare, and other job-related costs.

Some specialists worried that the policy would backfire—that working single mothers would be under too much stress and that increased cash would mean more smoking and drinking. By one measure, however, that doesn't seem to be happening. Judging by the weight of EITC beneficiaries' newborns, report three sociologists, Kate W. Strully of the State University of New York at

Albany; David H. Rehkopf of the University of California, San Francisco; and Ziming Xuan of the Harvard School of Public Health, low-income single mothers are benefiting from the policy.

Birth weight is a valuable indicator, not just because it acts as a proxy for the health of the mother during pregnancy but also because it can be a reliable predictor of future earnings and educational attainment of children.

Beginning in the 1980s, 16 states enacted their own versions of the tax credit to supplement the federal program. The authors found that low-

income single mothers in those states bore slightly bigger babies (about half an ounce heavier) than their peers in states without the additional assistance. One explanation is that pregnant mothers living in places with state EITCs smoked less than low-income single mothers elsewhere.

The authors say that the data for policies whose benefits decrease with earnings, such as AFDC and the newer Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, were less clear. One thing was certain: Both programs increased the likelihood of maternal smoking by nearly 10 percent.

HISTORY

Triumph of the Toughs

THE SOURCE: "Five Boys: The Story of a Picture" by Ian Jack, in *Intelligent Life*, Spring 2010.

ON JULY 10, 1937, THE BRITISH daily newspaper the *News Chronicle* published a photograph of five boys, two of them dressed in the English gentleman's uniform of top hat, tail coat, and silk waistcoat, and carrying canes. The three other boys stand to the side, smirking at the dandies, wearing oversized jackets, perhaps bought to last longer as the boys grew. Above the photo, taken by Jimmy Sime, the headline read, "Every Picture Tells a Story," and below it was a no-nonsense caption: "Outside Lord's, where the Eton-Harrow match opened yesterday." There was no accompanying article. The message of Britain's sharp class

division was self-evident.

In the decades since, the picture has illustrated countless articles about

rich and poor, and even graced the covers of two books. The photo speaks for itself; nothing more need be said. But *Guardian* columnist and former *Granta* editor Ian Jack tracked down each of the boys, and the story is quite different from what the picture so plainly suggests.

The photo's two "toffs," as later



From left to right: Peter Wagner, Thomas Dyson, George Salmon, Jack Catlin, and George Young.