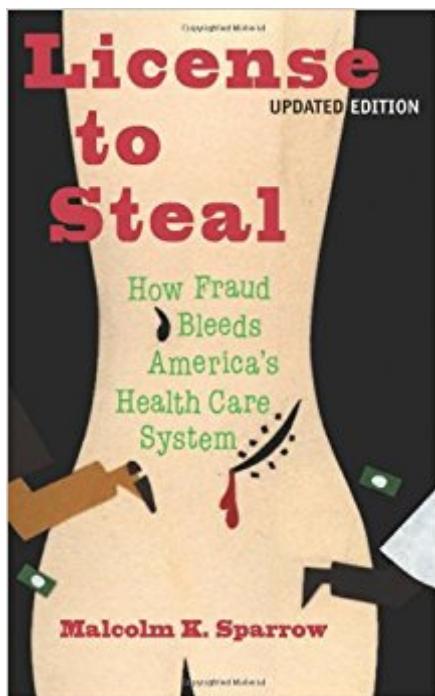


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License To Steal: How Fraud Bleeds America's Health Care System



Synopsis

Who steals? An extraordinary range of folk--from low-life hoods who sign on as Medicare or Medicaid providers equipped with nothing more than beepers and mailboxes, to drug trafficking organizations, organized crime syndicates, and even major hospital chains. In *License to Steal*, Malcolm K. Sparrow shows how the industry's defenses, which focus mostly on finding and correcting billing errors, are no match for such well orchestrated attacks. The maxim for thieves simply becomes "bill your lies correctly." Provided they do that, fraud perpetrators with any degree of sophistication can steal millions of dollars with impunity, testing payment systems carefully, and then spreading fraudulent billings widely enough across patient and provider accounts to escape detection. The kinds of highly automated, quality controlled claims processing systems that pervade the industry present fraud perpetrators with their favorite kind of target: rich, fast paying, transparent, utterly predictable check printing systems, with little threat of human intervention, and with the U.S. Treasury on the end of the electronic line. Sparrow picks apart the industry's response to the government's efforts to control this problem. The provider associations (well heeled and politically influential) have vociferously opposed almost every recent enforcement initiative, creating the unfortunate public impression that the entire health care industry is against effective fraud control. A significant segment of the industry, it seems, regards fraud and abuse not as a problem, but as a lucrative enterprise worth defending. Meanwhile, it remains a perfectly commonplace experience for patients or their relatives to examine a medical bill and discover that half of it never happened, or that; likewise, if patients then complain, they discover that no one seems to care, or that no one has the resources to do anything about it. Sparrow's research suggests that the growth of capitated managed care systems does not solve the problem, as many in the industry had assumed, but merely changes its form. The managed care environment produces scams involving underutilization, and the withholding of medical care schemes that are harder to uncover and investigate, and much more dangerous to human health. Having worked extensively with federal and state officials since the appearance of his first book on this subject, Sparrow is in a unique position to evaluate recent law enforcement initiatives. He admits the "war on fraud" is at least now engaged, but it is far from won.

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Customer Reviews

Malcolm K. Sparrow teaches Regulatory and Enforcement Strategy, and Analytic Methods, at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Formerly a Detective Chief Inspector with the British police service, he now specializes in issues of enforcement strategy, regulatory compliance, and risk control--he is the acknowledged national expert on the subject of Health Care Fraud. He is author of *The Risk Business: Defining the Regulatory Craft* (2000), *License to Steal: Why Fraud Plagues America's Health Care System* (1996), *Imposing Duties: Government's Changing Approach to Compliance* (1994); and co-author of *Beyond 911: A New Era for Policing* (1990) and *Ethics in Government: The Moral Challenge for Public Leadership* (1990).

While this book is now 12 years old, the concepts and arguments have not dated, even if some of the facts of healthcare fraud have changed in the intervening years. Sparrow brings an academic rigor to this topic which is sadly lacking in even more recent material. It's a pity the book has not been updated but Sparrow has moved on to other fields of endeavor. It's also a pity that there has not been a similar monograph on healthcare fraud in other countries given the differences in health systems around the globe and the legislative frameworks in which they operate. The tragedy about current debates in this field, particularly in the U.S. is the emphasis on the size of what is uncovered, as if this is something to be proud of, when in fact it highlights the inadequacy of existing system controls. This would not be tolerated in banking, but in the cottage industry which is health, this is treated as acceptable.

Delivered quickly and as described.

This is one of the best books ever written about the abuse of the Medicare program. Thorough and informative all the way through.

An incredibly relevant topic, in light of our debate regarding healthcare insurance and the push towards single payer. Though this is a very, very complex and technical field, Sparrow clearly and engagingly explains the issues, as well as including analogies to fraud detection in other fields, such as credit cards and tax returns (fascinating). Would love to see an updated or follow-up version of this that includes recent developments and issues raised by the Affordable Care Act. Would also love to see studies of how similar issues are dealt with in other countries. Are they plagued with thieves as we are?

Despite this book's age, the content remains relevant, perhaps even more so today as healthcare costs continue to rise. I found the book to be clear, thoughtful, and well-researched, and I would love to see an updated version of it if the author felt inclined to revise the material in the context of the Affordable Care Act.

An older book but still very prevalent to what is occurring in the world of Medicaid fraud. A good eye opener into what is occurring and why it is occurring. If you haven't read this yet I would recommend it.

If you are looking for the book with the same title by the famous *Faris Bueller's Day Off* actor and former *Wall Street Journal* Financial reporter and *Fox News* correspondent Ben(jamin) Stein about Michael Milken and Drexel Burnham Lambert and the Savings and Loan Junk Bond illegalities of the 1980's this is not it. That book is here <http://amzn.to/1KM09kM>

Although he has a wealth of expertise and a scholar's background, Sparrow speaks in a narrative style about the sad state of health care fraud in America today. While some progress is being made, there remains a little depth and sophistication in the responses to the complex and clever fraud schemes out there. Regretably, the many political and institutional barriers to measuring and uncovering fraud continue to allow the system to be drained of precious dollars. While it takes a large investment to begin the fight on the level Sparrow advocates, the return is immeasurably greater. Not recommended for folks who don't need their blood pressure to rise.

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