The U.S. currently ranks 50th for both female and male life expectancy, continuing to fall short compared to other developed countries. Despite more than doubling the average per capita healthcare expenditures and spending a larger percentage of gross domestic product than other industrialized nations, the average life expectancy in the U.S. is just 78 years, while countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, France, and Japan all exceed 80 years. Many critics argue that comparably low U.S. life expectancy rates are not only attributable to the current healthcare system, but also to the social and behavioral factors prevalent in the U.S., e.g., smoking, obesity, traffic accidents, and homicides.

A study conducted by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University examined the extent to which international survival rates may be explained by risk factors, such as smoking and obesity, unrelated to the healthcare system as a whole. In the U.S., obesity has grown at a slower rate and smoking prevalence has declined in comparison to other countries. Obesity is an increasingly visible risk determinant of overall health. The U.S. has a heavier population with an adult obesity rate of 33.8%, as compared to 3.4% in Japan and 24.2% in England. However, current U.S. obesity trends do not appear to be increasing fast enough to explain the overall decline of U.S. life expectancy. The growth of obesity in the U.S. is relatively slower than in many comparable countries.

Current evidence fails to support the assumption that the decline in U.S. life expectancy rates is primarily attributable to smoking. Although the U.S. smoking prevalence is comparable to Australia, the population outpaces Americans in the 15 year survival window. When researchers compared risk factors among 13 industrialized countries, small differences in smoking rates were observed, and smoking rates in the U.S. declined faster than in most developed countries. In 2006, the U.S. smoking rate for women and men was 15% and 19%, respectively, compared with rates in Japan as low as 14% for women to as high as 41.3% for men. Although the study did indicate that the amount of cigarette consumption by American smokers was relatively higher than comparison countries, cigarette consumption was not found to be linked to decreased life expectancy.

The Columbia University study did not support that the decline in life-expectancy rates in the U.S. is primarily attributable to major social and behavioral risk factors, increasing the support that life expectancy rates are indeed tied to challenges in the current U.S. health system. While some have suggested increasing rates of healthcare spending may reduce the number of uninsured persons in the U.S. and lead to increasing life expectancy rates, there is still uncertainty as to the impact of health insurance on population mortality. Studies similar to the RAND Health Insurance Experiment provide evidence that although insurance coverage affects health services, it appears to have small effect on overall population life expectancy. Evidence indicates an association between increased risk of mortality and lack of insurance.

At a community level, increased health spending may redirect funds from public health programs that could affect overall U.S. population health. Many critics argue that current investments in areas such as safety nets, public health, education, and community programs may lead to larger benefits for the population, extending life expectancy rates. The differences in social and behavioral risk factors across developed countries have drawn concerns regarding how effective the current U.S. health system truly is. While many critics point fingers at U.S. lifestyle choices as the primary factor decreasing life expectancy rates, studies assessing health outcomes for the treatment of these “high risk” behaviors show that the U.S. treatment outcomes surpass Germany and the United Kingdom. Generalized conclusions regarding factors contributing to decreased life expectancies should be carefully assessed before drawing any certain public health conclusions.

3 “Low Life Expectancy in the United States: Is the Health Care System at Fault?” By Samuel H. Preston and Jessica Y. Ho,
4  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2110
5  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2110
6  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2110
7  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2111
8  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2109
9  “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2111
10 “What Changes in Survival Rates Tell Us About US Health Care” By Peter A. Muennig and Sherry A. Glied, Health Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 11 (October 7, 2010), p.2111
Mr. Cimasi holds a Masters in Health Administration from the University of Maryland, as well as several professional designations: Accredited Senior Appraiser (ASA – American Society of Appraisers); Fellow Royal Intuition of Chartered Surveyors (FRICS – Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors); Master Certified Business Appraiser (MCBA – Institute of Business Appraisers); Accredited Valuation Analyst (AVA – National Association of Certified Valuators and Analysts); and, Certified Merger & Acquisition Advisor (CM&AA – Alliance of Merger & Acquisition Advisors). He has served as an expert witness on cases in numerous courts, and has provided testimony before federal and state legislative committees. He is a nationally known speaker on healthcare industry topics, the author of several books, the latest of which include: “The U.S. Healthcare Certificate of Need Sourcebook” [2005 – Beard Books], “An Exciting Insight into the Healthcare Industry and Medical Practice Valuation” [2002 – AICPA], and “A Guide to Consulting Services for Emerging Healthcare Organizations” [1999 John Wiley and Sons].

Mr. Cimasi is the author of numerous additional chapters in anthologies; books, and legal treatises; published articles in peer reviewed and industry trade journals; research papers and case studies; and, is often quoted by healthcare industry press. In 2006, Mr. Cimasi was honored with the prestigious “Shannon Pratt Award in Business Valuation” conferred by the Institute of Business Appraisers. Mr. Cimasi serves on the Editorial Board of the Business Appraisals Practice of the Institute of Business Appraisers, of which he is a member of the College of Fellows.

Todd A. Zigrang, MBA, MHA, ASA, FACHE, is the Senior Vice President of HEALTH CAPITAL CONSULTANTS (HCC), where he focuses on the areas valuation and financial analysis for hospitals and other healthcare enterprises. Mr. Zigrang has significant physician integration and financial analysis experience, and has participated in the development of a physician-owned multi-specialty MSO and networks involving a wide range of specialties; physician-owned hospitals, as well as several limited liability companies for the purpose of acquiring acute care and specialty hospitals, ASCs and other ancillary facilities; participated in the evaluation and negotiation of managed care contracts, performed and assisted in the valuation of various healthcare entities and related litigation support engagements; created pro-forma financials; written business plans; conducted a range of industry research; completed due diligence practice analysis; overseen the selection process for vendors, contractors, and architects; and, worked on the arrangement of financing.

Mr. Zigrang holds a Master of Science in Health Administration and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Missouri at Columbia, and is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives. He has co-authored “Research and Financial Benchmarking in the Healthcare Industry” (STP Financial Management) and “Healthcare Industry Research and its Application in Financial Consulting” (Aspen Publishers). He has additionally taught before the Institute of Business Appraisers and CPA Leadership Institute, and has presented healthcare industry valuation related research papers before the Healthcare Financial Management Association; the National CPA Health Care Adviser’s Association; Association for Corporate Growth; Infocast Executive Education Series; the St. Louis Business Valuation Roundtable; and, Physician Hospitals of America.

Anne P. Sharamitaro, Esq., is the Vice President of HEALTH CAPITAL CONSULTANTS (HCC), where she focuses on the areas of Certificate of Need (CON); regulatory compliance, managed care, and antitrust consulting. Ms. Sharamitaro is a member of the Missouri Bar and holds a J.D. and Health Law Certificate from Saint Louis University School of Law, where she served as an editor for the Journal of Health Law, published by the American Health Lawyers Association. She has presented healthcare industry related research papers before Physician Hospitals of America and the National Association of Certified Valuation Analysts and co-authored chapters in “Healthcare Organizations: Financial Management Strategies,” published in 2008.