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# Changing patterns of pharmaceutical practice in the United States

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## Abstract

In the United States, contradictions related to medicine use abound in a social environment in which the pursuit of health has become a cultural project. In a marketplace where over half a million health products are available, choices at once seem to foster agency and encourage dependency on medical fixes. The aggressive marketing of medicines as indispensable commodities co-exists with rising concerns among the lay population about what is safe in the short- and long-term. In this paper we broadly consider medication-related practice in the United States as it is affected by social, cultural, and political-economic factors. We direct attention to changes in medicine use related to product proliferation, lowered thresholds of discomfort, the economics of health care, and a revival of the self-help ethic. We also consider the manner in which the demand for and use of medications reflect deeply embedded cultural ideals and emergent perceptions of need. We juxtapose two trends in American thinking about

medicines: (1) the perception that "more is better," associated with cultural impatience with illness; and (2) a growing doubt about medicine necessity, safety, and efficacy.



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## Keywords

pharmaceutical practice; popular health culture; self-medication; alternative medicine

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