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IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

When Will We Grasp the Power of Incremental Care?

In the January 23, 2017, issue of *The New Yorker*, in "Tell Me Where It Hurts" (p. 36), **Atul Gawande**, a surgeon at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital, explores the state of health care in America, particularly our emphasis on rescue medicine and neglect of the kind of steady, intimate care over time that often helps people more. Our health-care system was built at a time when illness was experienced as a random catastrophe, so hospitals and heroic interventions got the large investments. But today, medical discovery is making it so incrementalists—practitioners who produce value by improving people's lives over extended periods of time—are demonstrating ever larger benefits for people's lives. Today, the highest-paid specialists in American medicine are interventionists, such as orthopedists and cardiologists, while the lowest-paid specialists are incrementalists, such as pediatricians, internists, and psychiatrists. Gawande writes, "as an American surgeon, I have a battalion of people and millions of dollars of equipment on hand when I arrive in my operating room. Incrementalists are lucky if they can hire a nurse." But fields like primary care, he says, do "a lot of good for people—maybe even more good, in the long run," than he will as a surgeon. Studies have found that states with higher ratios of primary care physicians have lower rates of general mortality, infant mortality, and mortality from specific conditions such as heart disease and stroke. Having a regular source of medical care, from a doctor who knows you, has a powerful effect on your willingness to seek care for severe symptoms. Success is "not about the episodic, momentary victories, though they do play a role. It is about the longer view of incremental steps that produce sustained progress," Gawande writes. Asaf Bitton, an internist, tells Gawande, "It's no one thing we do. It's all of it."

In the next few months, if Congress repeals the Affordable Care Act, people like Gawande's son Walker, who was born with a heart condition, will be unable to find health insurance. And research indicates that twenty-seven per cent of adults under sixty-five are like Walker, with past health conditions that make them uninsurable without the protections of the A.C.A. But the rising power of predictive, individual data on everything from our genome to our living patterns means, Gawande writes, "life is a preexisting condition waiting to happen. We will all turn out to have . . . a lurking heart condition or a tumor or a depression or some rare disease that needs to be managed." This is a problem for our health system, which doesn't put great value on care that takes time to pay off—but it is also an opportunity. Gawande writes, "We can give up an antiquated set of priorities and shift our focus from rescue medicine to lifelong incremental care. Or we can leave millions of people to suffer and die from conditions that, increasingly, can be predicted and managed. This isn't a bloodless policy choice; it's a medical emergency."

An Unusual Team of White House Scientists Works Through the Final Days of the Administration

In "Good Behavior" (p. 46), **Sarah Stillman** reports on cognitive scientist Maya Shankar and her Social and Behavioral Sciences Team at the Obama White House, also known as the President's "nudge unit," who try to improve public policy using the growing body of knowledge about the quirks of the human brain. When Shankar launched the team, in early 2014, she had no budget, no mandate, and no bonafide employees. Within two years, the small group of scientists had become a staff of dozens working with more than twenty federal agencies on seventy projects, from fixing gaps in veterans' health care to relieving student debt. Initially, Shankar and her colleagues focussed

on programs that were narrowly defined, such as easing health-insurance enrollment, or helping veterans access education benefits. But Shankar was eager to see how her team might weigh in on the seemingly intractable problems associated with inequality, from homelessness to racial bias in policing. Recently, she's turned her attention to the problems in Flint, Michigan, where the crisis over lead contamination of the drinking water had stretched on for almost two years. Stillman travelled with Shankar to Flint, where she aimed to introduce new behavioral tools to leaders in the city, and to engage with them on some of the more vexing challenges, like combatting the spread of misinformation. The goal was to come up with science-backed interventions that could unfold over the next several years. But Flint community activist Art Woodson asked Shankar if, when President Obama left office, people like Shankar and her team would have to leave, too. Shankar told him, "I'm not willing to give up until the last day."

Following the election of Donald Trump, Shankar's team, if it even continues to exist in the new Administration, would soon belong to one of the most anti-science President-elects in history. The remedies that would help Flint residents—stringent environmental accountability, and funding for maternal health care, childhood nutrition, early-childhood education, and other programs thought to mitigate lead's long-term effects—were resources that would be imperilled under Trump. Shankar and her team's desire to test more ambitious interventions—such as those exploring the intergenerational roots of poverty and inequality—will likely go unfulfilled. The team had just begun working on ways to help with police reforms, and helping to create



new materials for post-prison reëntry programs; they had ideas for efforts to keep expanding access to school lunches, student-debt relief, and Obamacare. Making good on her promise to Woodson, Shankar stayed in her D.C. office until early January, when she took her last box of mementos home. How Trump will use behavioral science in the White House is anyone's guess.

A Deportation Crisis Has Fuelled an Unlikely Industry

In "Called Away" (p. 30), **Jonathan Blitzer** reports from El Salvador, and examines how deportations from the United States have fuelled the call-center industry by bringing an influx of English-speaking job-seekers to the country. Blitzer speaks with Eddie Anzora, a thirty-nine-year-old Salvadoran who lived in California between the ages of two and twenty-nine, when he was ordered deported for drug possession. By the time Anzora returned to El Salvador, in 2007, it had become one of the most dangerous countries in the world, gripped by an intractable gang war that started as a result of mass deportations from the U.S. in the nineteen-nineties. Salvadorans who had sought asylum in the U.S. in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, during a twelve-year civil war in their country, landed in American cities like L.A. Many of them moved to South Central, the inner city, where they faced violence and abuse by local thugs. Some Salvadorans began creating gangs of their own as a mode of self-defense. Over time, prisons throughout the city filled with Salvadoran gangsters. After the war, the U.S. began deporting them back to El Salvador. The gang feuds of L.A. migrated with them.

By the time Anzora returned, deportees were easy targets for the fiercely territorial Salvadoran gangs. "Any trace of Americanness—a barely perceptible gesture—was a potentially fatal liability," Blitzer writes. Even Anzora, who never participated in the gangs back in L.A., needed to be "low-pro," he told Blitzer, to call less attention to himself.

Anzora was one of twenty thousand Salvadorans deported in 2007. Deportees generally speak fluent and idiomatic English—the most crucial requirement for call-center work, since the customers are based in the U.S. "Their next most important quality is their desperation," Blitzer writes. They are loyal employees with no other employment prospects. Because of the gang wars, many Salvadorans associate deportation with hard-core criminality. "Someone coming from the States has that American hip-hop fashion," Anzora said. "Here they don't see it as hip-hop fashion. They see it as gang-member fashion." The anthropologist Juan José Martínez told Blitzer, "The deportees are hugely stigmatized.... No one wants to hire gangsters—even though that's not what many of the deportees are." Call centers offer stable work and income for deportees. At Sykes, the call-center firm where Anzora first started working, he made close to a hundred and fifty dollars a week, which amounted to three times the Salvadoran minimum wage. After a few years, he made enough money to start his own family, and in 2015 he launched his own language school, English Cool. It is one of a handful of language schools that have cropped up to address the demands of call-center work. Americanized deportees often run and staff them. "English is coming back in style," Anzora told Blitzer. "People want to speak it, because it means you can get work."

A Lifetime of Drinking

In "My Father's Cellar" (p. 22), **John Seabrook** chronicles his lifelong relationship with alcohol—from the first time his father brought him to their house's hidden wine cellar, when he was seven or eight; to his first full glass of Champagne, a '59 Bollinger, on his thirteenth birthday; to his own drinking career, which ended last year, when he took his last drink on what would have been his father's ninety-ninth birthday. Seabrook writes, "Just what was my father up to, in introducing me to alcohol? He was passing along something he loved, and, moreover, something we could do together for the rest of his life (and did). . . . It was as though the only way he could express his love as a father was to teach me to be just like him, starting by giving me his name . . . [He] didn't anticipate that when it came to alcohol I was not going to be like him."

Plus: In Comment, George Packer reflects on President Obama's farewell address, which "will stand as an emblem of what we've been and perhaps can be" (p. 17); in the Financial Page, James Surowiecki looks at New York City's long-awaited Second Avenue Subway, and considers why American infrastructure projects often run over budget and behind schedule (p. 21); in Shouts & Murmurs, Jesse Eisenberg recounts the sinister cabal of his mother, his fiancée, his orthodontist, and a fiendish lawyer (p. 29); Emily Nussbaum examines how jokes shaped the 2016 election (p. 66); Benjamin Kunkel reads a new translation of Antonio Di Benedetto's novel "Zama" (p. 72); Hua Hsu listens to "Run the Jewels 3," a new album by El-P and Killer Mike (p. 76); Alex Ross examines the minimalist music of Julius Eastman (p. 78); poetry by Frank Bidart (p. 40) and Liz Waldner (p. 63); and new fiction by Elif Batuman (p. 56).

Podcasts: Dorothy Wickenden and **Evan Osnos** discuss Donald Trump's alleged entanglements with Russia, and how the Trump Administration will govern; **Amy Davidson** speaks with Debbie Walsh, the director of the Center for American Women and Politics, at Rutgers University, about how the electoral system in the United States is particularly unfavorable to women; **Elif Batuman** reads her short story "Constructed Worlds"; **Paul Muldoon** speaks with the poet **Brenda Shaughnessy**.

Digital Extras: Frank Bidart reads his poem, and **Richard Brody** comments on scenes from Vincente Minnelli's "Home from the Hill," from 1960.

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