

David C. Colby Interview

David Colby: Are we rolling?

Male Voice: [Inaudible]

David Colby: David C. Colby. D-A-V-I-D C. C-O-L-B-Y. I'm the vice president for research and evaluation at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Jennifer Muldoon: So Doctor Colby, why did you choose to work in the field of health services research?

David Colby: I started as a political scientist and I was very interested in public policy issues. And then I had a Robert Wood Johnson Fellowship from a program called Health Finance Fellows, and that is the point where I really turned into thinking about the questions of health services research, especially around the health policy questions.

Jennifer Muldoon: In your opinion, what are some of the most significant contributions of health services research?

David Colby: The most significant contributions around, I think, around the medical care system and improvement of the medical care system, both in quality of care - we first learned how to measure quality of care - and then we learned how to use those measures to try to move quality of care. And then the same kind of thing happened in access to care where we learned how to measure access to care, and we're learning how to use that to improve the access to care for Americans.

Jennifer Muldoon: How about opportunities for the field's future?

David Colby: I think the future really lies in much more of an intersection between sciences and health services research; that we need to move the field to think about genomics; understanding of the natural science so that health services research can really study the use of natural sciences and genomics in provision of healthcare.

Jennifer Muldoon: Do you have any advice for someone considering a career in health services research?

David Colby: I think since it's a two trillion dollar part of our economy and it's growing, it's a great field to get into and will continue to be a great field.

Jennifer Muldoon: Back in the early days back when the annual meeting was just getting underway, what were some of the important health policy and research issues?

David Colby: The issues were really around, I think, mainly around access to care, health insurance coverage, and Medicare and Medicaid issues in those early years, and mainly on the sort of medical care system. They weren't on the health system - or lack of system.

Jennifer Muldoon: And where do you think - what do you think will be the important issues of tomorrow, say, ten years from now?

David Colby: I think the important issues are really going to be around spreading a more public health system across the country that is more viable and delivers more care; that we sort of think about population health and not just medical care system.

Jennifer Muldoon: And what are the challenges we face to address those issues?

David Colby: I think the challenges are - there's a huge data challenge in addressing those issues. We don't have a lot of information we can use to address them at least on an intervention side. We have sort of national surveys, but we can't tell what's happening in local areas, and so I think there are huge data problems. There are also conceptual problems. We have a public health system that is largely politically invisible in healthcare and we don't realize the benefits it is providing.

Jennifer Muldoon: How can Academy Health help achieve the future vision?

David Colby: Well, I think Academy Health can help achieve a future vision by really taking, I think, the students that are coming through the pipeline, at this point, and getting them oriented much more towards population health and much more towards the natural science aspects of health.

Jennifer Muldoon: Is there anything you would like to add?

David Colby: Like to ask?

Jennifer Muldoon: No, add, anything you would like to add?

David Colby: Oh [laughter]. Okay. Well, the 1988 meeting and the earthquake were fine in San Francisco. They're going to take that one out. [Laughter]

Jennifer Muldoon: Yes, we'll edit that out. No, thanks - that's it for all the questions.

David Colby: Okay.

Jennifer Muldoon: I told you I wouldn't ask you about your favorite-