

U.S. HEALTHCARE POLICY AND MEDICAL BREAKTHROUGHS

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Pure Food and Drug Act, U.S. #3182f, 1998

The Pure Food and Drug Act was passed by Congress in 1906. It was one of the earliest consumer protection laws and a prime example of government regulation of business. Though this law was not controversial, the whole area of government regulation has been a very sensitive political issue. Some argue that such regulation is government over-reach and that self-regulation is a better approach. Others believe that such public regulation will keep the private sector in check.



Antibiotics Save Lives, U.S. #3186b, 1999

This stamp, part of the 1940s edition of the “Celebrate the Century” series, recognizes the life-saving development of antibiotics. The credit for developing the first antibiotic, penicillin for pneumonia, goes to British scientist, Arthur Fleming in 1928. The 1940s saw numerous antibiotics created for use against various diseases. However, recent history has seen a decline in antibiotics as a treatment because of resistance to the drugs. Furthermore, creating new antibiotics has gotten so expensive, profitability has been difficult to achieve. Many major pharmaceutical companies have shut down their antibiotic research programs due to low return on investment.



Polio Vaccine Developed, U.S. #3187a, 1998

Poliomyelitis, commonly known as polio, is an infectious disease that has been around for many centuries. The disease was highly contagious and poor sanitation was a major risk factor. Although a large percentage of the infected were asymptomatic, the others experienced severe muscular weakness and atrophy, paralysis, and even death. An epidemic in the 1940s and early 1950s spurred a U.S. research team led by Dr. Jonas Salk to develop an injectable vaccine to prevent infection. In conjunction with an oral vaccine developed by Dr. Alfred Sabin, polio has been largely eradicated worldwide.



Medical Imaging, U.S. #3189o, 1999

This stamp, part of the 1970s “Celebrate the Century” series, illustrates medical imaging which has become an essential part of modern medical practice. The invention of the Computer Tomography or CT scanner in 1972 was the breakthrough for which its British inventor, Godfrey Hounsfield, received the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1979. Other widely used medical imaging techniques include Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans. Currently, there are upwards of 10000 imaging centers in the U.S. with total revenues in excess of \$100 billion. The U.S. market leader in the production of medical imaging equipment is GE Healthcare.