

Behavioral economics has a plan to fight poverty—and it's all about redesigning the “cockpit”

October 19, 2017

Dr. Bryan Bledsoe was just trying to keep up. The ER at the small rural hospital was always packed and the top brass had urged him to move patients through more quickly, so when a woman in her sixties came in complaining of head and neck pain, he briskly examined her, hustled her off for an x-ray, gave her some pain medication for a pulled muscle, and dispatched her home.

The next morning, though, she was back—this time in an ambulance. Bledsoe had missed the signs of an impending stroke. The woman died in the hospital that day.

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The context of “scarcity,” as researchers Eldar Shafir and Sendhil Mullainathan dubbed it in their book *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*, actually changes the way we think. We get tunnel vision, able to focus only on the present problem—the thing we lack—in a kind of fire-fighting mode, leaving us with less bandwidth for everything else.