

The Wisdom of America's Elders

Opinions

TO SEND US YOUR OPINIONS – [Click Here](#)

Can Health Care Costs Be Controlled?

By Harris Sherline

How many people do you know who think their Congressman has the answers to providing health care in America? Or, their Senator? How about Bill Frist? George W. Bush? Bill Clinton? Hillary Clinton? Or, for that matter, any politician? Do they really have the answers?

If they can't do it, then how about the politicians in Canada, or Great Britain? Have they solved the problem in their societies? Some people believe they have. However, in England, where the private practice of medicine was outlawed when socialized medicine was first established there, they were eventually forced to reverse their policy and permit the public to go outside the state system to obtain health care from private physicians.

In Canada today, the story is much the same. Many Canadians come to the U.S. for emergent needs, such as bypass surgery, because the waiting time in Canada is interminable, often many months before their citizens can get life-saving treatment when they need it.

All state-run health care systems have one thing in common: rationing. Not necessarily involving the use of ration cards, but rationing nonetheless. Rationing of resources. The cause is a devilishly simple principle that is present in all nationalized health care programs. That is, it's free, or so low cost that it's almost free. Basic economics clearly demonstrates that whenever something is free, the demand quickly becomes unlimited. The lower the price, the greater the demand. Give something away that people want and you can "sell" everything you have and more.

However, the flip side of unlimited demand is a shortage of supply. And, not having enough doctors, nurses, or equipment, such as CAT Scans and MRIs, eventually leads to rationing. Without enough health care to go around, rationing becomes a necessity. That's what has been wrong with nationalized health care in England, Canada, Germany, Japan, the former USSR, everywhere it has been tried.

If there are no politicians who really know what should be done to solve our health care problems why do we keep expecting them to come up with the answers?

Just exactly what are the problems? Too many uninsured? Too high cost? Poor quality? Lack of availability? All of the above? Do you know? Or think you know?

What have been the government's (read politicians') solutions to date?

National health care (socialized medicine) in one form or another is the primary health care policy that is gradually being adopted in America. And it is slowly but surely lowering the quality of the health care we are getting. Talk to any doctor you trust and see if they don't agree. They will tell you that they are working much longer hours for far less money, that many M.D.s are retiring early because they are fed up with the government and insurance company bureaucrats telling them how to practice medicine. There is a growing shortage of doctors and nurses.

But, you may say, we don't have socialized medicine in America! Perhaps not yet, but

we've been headed in that direction for a while, and we seem to be going further down the path as the years progress. It's a slippery slope. For example, consider Medicare.

But, Medicare is not socialized medicine, you may insist.

Unfortunately, it is, or is headed that way. Why? For one thing, it's a system that is based on price controls.

Price controls have never worked, ever, in any society at any time in history. They were tried as early as 301 A.D. by a Roman emperor, Diocletian (243-316 A.D.) who implemented price controls under penalty of death. But, even that didn't work, and it hasn't worked since. What price controls do is cause shortages, increased costs and disrupted markets.

Look at what has happened to the Medicare program since 1984, the year the government changed its method of reimbursing hospitals from cost plus to a system called DRGs (Diagnostic Related Groupings). DRGs is a method of classifying illnesses and assigning a comparative value and a specific authorized payment to each. At that point, many hospitals began to lose money because the government started dictating the prices that are paid for inpatient care.

Around 70% of most hospitals' patients are seniors, whose bills are paid by Medicare. The Federal Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) determines, in its sole discretion, the prices that can be charged for seniors' inpatient hospital care, and then pays only 80% of those amounts. The differences between a hospital's standard fees for service and the amounts that Medicare pays must be written off. They cannot be collected from the patient. That's price control.

Furthermore, because Medicare payments are determined solely by the government, annual cost of living increases are limited, generally to between 1-1/2% and 2-1/2%, in spite of the fact that hospital costs have been rising for years at an annual rate of anywhere from 6% to 14%.

Another little known fact about Medicare is that seniors are prevented from seeking care outside the Medicare system, even if they are willing to pay the bill themselves. Any doctor who accepts payment directly from a senior is automatically disqualified from providing care to all Medicare patients for a period of two years. This is especially important in situations where a patient wants a second opinion and would like to see another doctor. That type of control is certainly an element of socialized medicine.

Between health insurance contracts (HMOs) and Medicare limits on their charges, hospitals generally collect only about 50% of their total billings. The rest is written off. The result of all this is predictable: most of them are losing money. About 70% of all hospitals in California are currently operating at a loss. For the non-profit hospitals, part of the loss is made-up through fund raising, but it's not enough. With a national health care plan, at some point, many hospitals would either be closed or services curtailed. That has been the pattern in every country that has nationalized its health care. Nonetheless, that seems to be where we are headed, in spite of compelling evidence that it doesn't work.

Like the proverbial frog being cooked in a pot of cold water, Americans are gradually becoming aware that the quality of their health care is declining, even as costs continue to go up. It just hasn't sunk in yet. When it does, they will undoubtedly be led into believing government has the answers and demand more government control, regulation and oversight. And, our politicians will be only too willing to oblige.

Nationalized health care in America is gradually overtaking the free market, and we are all being slowly cooked in the pot of government intervention. So, don't be surprised at the type of health care program we get as time progresses. Whatever your own conclusions, remember one thing: that our politicians won't have to rely on whatever health care plan they establish for everyone else. As usual, they will have their own, superior plan. And, it will not be a part of the nationalized health care system that the rest of us will be required to use. If you doubt that

assertion, just look at the health care plan that our Federal legislators and government employees have now.

What Say You?
Tell us if you agree or disagree and why: [Click Here](#)

Are We Schizo or What?

By Harris Sherline

The Supreme Court has held that abortion is a constitutional right; however, that right has caused a great deal of confusion in our society. It is legal to abort a fetus at almost any stage of its development, including mere moments before the infant is born (“partial birth abortion”), but it is homicide if the fetus is killed, say, by a gunshot wound in the mother’s stomach. However, it is not murder for a mother to terminate her own pregnancy at the same stage of development for purely personal reasons. So, for some purposes, the law recognizes the same fetus as a living person, for others it does not.

Tobacco is a legal product and is heavily taxed by the same government that has subsidized tobacco farmers for decades. Both the Federal and state governments tax cigarettes, ostensibly to offset health care costs incurred by smokers or to establish programs designed to discourage young people from smoking. Then they use the money for other purposes, often completely unrelated to tobacco use. If the product is so bad, why not just make it illegal? The obvious answer is that there is just too much money in it for the government and our politicians. So, the product stays legal and is both heavily taxed and subsidized, health considerations aside, so long as it keeps feeding money into our tax coffers.

We put people in jail for ingesting something they like (as in drugs), while tolerating, even encouraging, the proliferation and aggressive marketing of prescription drugs throughout our culture, including the schools. At the same time, using marijuana for health reasons, even with a doctor’s prescription, is still a Federal crime, even in those states that have legalized it.

We tell our children that sex before marriage or at too early an age is a bad idea, while dispensing condoms to them at the schools.

In many states, underage girls must have their parents’ permission for a medical procedure, or to have their ears pierced, but they can get an abortion without parental consent or knowledge.

We try to teach young people that they should be good citizens and respect the law, while at the same time we tolerate the airwaves being flooded with music, videos and TV programs that are vulgar, challenge authority, celebrate violence, preach hatred and generally pollutes their minds.

Americans treasure their rights, yet for generations we have passed laws that intrude into the lives of people in a wide range of areas: limiting free speech, restricting the ownership of guns, intrusive tax regulation, making various consensual sexual acts illegal (even for married couples), and smoking, to name just a few.

Gambling is illegal or strictly regulated in various states, often bemoaning the fact that it can be addictive, yet many of those same governments operate and aggressively promote lotteries.

We constantly preach tolerance, but experience far too many shocking incidents of intolerance and prejudice, abuse, brutality and murder.

Is it any wonder there are so many problems in America today and that our children are often confused about the meaning of right and wrong when there is such contradictory, schizophrenic behavior in our society?

TO SEND US YOUR OPINIONS – [Click Here](#)

[Return To Home Page](#)