

Health Care Snafu

Who's Left Behind?

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Apparently, there's a new health insurance program in the U.S. I know this because of all the emails I'm getting, which I read with interest. However, I don't read, watch or listen to the news – the media can't report objectively on this item (like most others), and they leave out key issues.

The key issue left out of the continuing health care discussions – not only by the media but by almost all involved – is the question of who's really left behind. This question is not addressed by making sure most people have insurance – it actually makes it worse. Just as serious a problem is who's *not* left behind.

The majority of people are quite unhealthy. And, most diseases – and deaths – are preventable. Who is responsible for this dilemma? Certainly the government allows companies to make and sell products that are unhealthy, thanks to lobbyists, and both share in the responsibility. A few large corporate conglomerates make trillions of dollars selling junk food that contributes to illness and death. And retailers participate by selling these items. Effective billion-dollar advertising campaigns get consumers, including children, to consume these products. Many of these foods are cunningly disguised as being healthy. Whole Foods is an example; like most health food stores, most of the items they sell are unhealthy, often organic, junk foods.

So who's left behind in this so-called new health insurance overhaul? The same people who were left behind before, plus all those who now will be covered by health insurance. Why? Because these and other

programs further take away the individual's responsibility for their own health.

Those who are not left behind are the few people, insured or not (many of whom are members of this website), who take serious the responsibility for their own health. While I've been promoting this issue my whole career, other health care professions, authors and individuals also contribute by directly and indirectly influencing others in positive ways. But these influences are insignificant compared to what government (and the lobbyists) and big business (who spend trillions of dollars) do to convince people to participate in unhealthy activities.

Who's not really left behind? The companies who benefit most by making money from an aging, sick population. Including those who directly contribute to chronic illness – especially companies that make and sell unhealthy food products – like the cigarette companies have done for decades.

Despite new insurance regulation, three ongoing problems continue to hold up a failed health care system.

Disease Care

First, most people don't really use health care. Instead, they rely on disease care. The current system waits for disease to appear, then uses expensive drugs and therapies to treat the disease. The fact is, most diseases are preventable – from cancer and heart disease to Alzheimer's and all those mechanical injuries of the back, knee, hip and other areas surgically treated with artificial joints and other surgeries. Treating end-result symptoms and ignoring the causes of disease is the real epidemic.

Who Dictates Care?

More than ever, the new program will encourage millions more people to rely on others to dictate their health needs. This includes the government who has numerous programs (Medicare, Medicaid and others), insurance companies (who dictate which doctors and what therapies you can and can not have) and others, including employers who dangle insurance policies (that you pay for directly or indirectly).

In addition, lobbyists for the insurance industry, pharmaceutical companies and other product and service sectors in “health” care keep making it easy to be covered by insurance, get prescriptions and buy the latest over-the-counter drugs.

I’m not opposed to drugs or surgery, or even insurance. I’m opposed to how they are used and abused. This includes using expensive, high-risk remedies as a first approach to treating common disorders that typically respond to more conservative, much less expensive but high quality care that usually comes with little or no side effects.

Am I Covered for That?

Too often, patients are willing to take a drug, have a surgical procedure or even participate in a radical experimental therapy before other more conservative and even effective options are available – because their insurance will cover it.

Here’s a common scenario. Bob goes to his doctor because of chronic knee pain. The doctor recommends surgery; after all, Bob chose his own therapy by picking a surgeon from the list of health care professionals covered by his insurance. The doctor comforts Bob with the fact that he’s covered for the procedure. Bob consults me for a second opinion, and after assessing his problem I recommend more conservative therapy for his minor problem. But his insurance won’t cover it. Bob chooses

surgery at 10 to 20 times the cost, but has no out-of-pocket expense. I’ve experienced this type of scenario many times in my years of private practice.

Who’s Responsible for My Health?

Are most people willing to take care of themselves? That’s a difficult question to ask, and unfortunately, most people are not even willing to ponder the answer. Certainly, some people are not only willing but are succeeding in taking care of themselves, by eating well, exercising, controlling stress and toxins, and other features associated with being responsible for their own health. This is the real meaning of prevention (screening for disease is not).

Only when we’re taking responsibility for our own health can we truly prevent illness and disease, and develop and maintain a higher quality of life until we die.

In being responsible, we most easily avoid being trapped by insurance companies and government programs willing to cut us open when it’s not really necessary, by food giants selling us foods that slowly kill us, and force us to visit doctors we don’t necessarily want to see (while avoiding those we prefer).

Our health is in our hands, but too many have let go while grasping for the illusion of health care. The new insurance overhaul just ties their hands even more. There’s no free lunch, although the insurance environment offers one that promotes heart disease, cancer and other debilitating illness.

Buy your own lunch – choose your food wisely. That’s what I do.