

Universal Healthcare Is Not the Solution

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A report issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2000 ranked France's healthcare system as number 1 while the United States's healthcare system was ranked as 37th just below Costa Rica!(1) Left wing propagandists cite such "data" to justify their assertion that our healthcare system is fatally flawed and must be replaced with a universal system. Yet when our healthcare system is measured on outcomes for specific diseases the American system clearly outperforms all others. When our system is measured on the development of new drugs and technology it outperforms all others. It should also be noted that when criteria such as choice of physician, autonomy, timely care and confidentiality were used the WHO ranked our system as number 1. One of the reasons for our low ranking in the former WHO study cited is that study's criteria included subjective values such as "fairness" and tobacco control.(2) Before we destroy the best healthcare system in the world perhaps we should determine whether the proposed alternatives are likely to yield better results.

As noted France was ranked number 1 in the WHO report but its expenditures on healthcare is the major factor driving France's budget deficit. To control the increasing healthcare cost the government has begun imposing restrictions to access to physicians (a form of rationing). Some studies show that 90% of French asthma patients are not receiving appropriate drugs to control their disease.(3) Yes, there is a crises in the universal healthcare system in France as evidenced by the fact that 65% of the population think that system reform is urgent!(4)

Italy was ranked number 2 in the WHO report but the country is plagued by substandard hospitals and lengthy waiting list (a form of rationing) especially for diagnostic studies. As many as 60% of the population think that reform is urgent plus another 24% who think it is desirable-another universal healthcare system in crises.(5)

Germany, ranked 25th, has a universal system that has resulted in physicians' wages being only 20% of their American counterpart.(6) This has led to numerous physician strikes! Some 76% of the population thinks reform is urgent plus another 14% who think it desirable-healthcare crises even in the land of traditional Bismarckian Prussian socialism!(7)

Great Britain, ranked 18th, has a universal healthcare system that has as many as 750,000 sick individuals awaiting admission to a hospital (rationing by any other name is still rationing).(8) Approximately 20% of treatable colon cancer cases are incurable by the time treatment is offered and around 40% of cancer patients never get to see an oncologist. Sixty-three percent (63%) of Britons think that healthcare reform is urgent plus another 24% who think it desirable.(9) The nation that gave us Fabian Socialism and Keynesian economics is also in health care crises!

A review of "universal" healthcare systems around the world will demonstrate that many if not most are in some form of "crises;" all are plagued with increasing costs that is straining overall government budgets; some form of limiting access (rationing) is being used in an attempt to control cost; and innovations in new drugs and medical technology has virtually ceased.

Instead of joining Europe by embracing Prussian, Fabian, or Keynesian socialism perhaps we should consider an equally radical but proven alternative-establish a true free market in healthcare. Allow consumers to determine how they will spend their healthcare dollars. But this presumes that government will radically reduce its tax rates (now consuming 40 to 60% of consumers' income) thereby providing a substantial increase in disposable income (not to mention a tremendous stimulus to real economic, job producing, activity). Consumers seeking the highest quality at the lowest cost will naturally drive down cost while increasing quality. In addition a true free market approach is free of compulsion-whereas in a universal healthcare system individuals are compelled by the threat of police power of the state to accept healthcare as directed by politically appointed bureaucrats.

If we as a nation are going to make a radical change in our healthcare system, then at least we should select a radical alternative that will provide the highest quality of care to the most people in a system free of compulsion.

(1) The Grass Is Not Always Greener; A Look at National Health Care Systems Around the World, Michael Tanner, Policy Analysis No. 613, March 18, 2008, CATO Institute, p. 4

(2) Ibid p. 3

(3) Ibid p. 10

(4) Ibid p. 12

(5) Ibid p. 14

(6) Ibid p. 30

(7) Ibid p. 31

(8) Ibid p. 24

(9) Ibid p. 25