

Single Payer Universal Health Care - Redux

By Harvey Hodges

Another day, another way to discuss the need for this country to finally start to catch up with the rest of the world with regard to universal access to health care for all our citizens. As I take keyboard in hand, I ruminate on the horrid situation we have in this country regarding health care. Each and every day in this country we have people die for the most heinous of reasons, lack of access to medical treatment. There are approximately 18,000 people each year who die from a lack of access to health care treatments.

Recently in the Washington DC area a young boy died because his family was too poor to afford a health plan and earned too much to be considered for the state's medicaid program. There are a lot of medical things to discuss regarding this child's death, but the straight forward reason was that he had a dental infection that spread into his system and killed him.

Where is the AARP on this topic?

I know of very few people in this country who would balk at providing health care access to all citizens. But those few people are extremely vocal and are not adverse to telling outright lies to keep this program from coming to fruition. Take a walk in the slime pit known as the Issues and Election board of the AARP Member Forums and read some of the crap that these lying water boys for the medical industry, are saying about SP-UHC. It will turn your stomach, but then most of the crap on that forum turns this old guys stomach.

By the way the Member title in the forum is tongue in cheek since very few of the people who post there are actual members or actual seniors. Well at least from their actions and the vile commentary they launch on a daily basis. But I digress!

The truly abominable aspect of the AARP, and their almost criminal negligence in this area that they are teaming up with the major corporations (health insurance, pharmaceutical, etc) through the Business Roundtable and with a labor union (I believe it is the Service Employees union) to promote a "universal health care plan" of their own. This so called plan is huge sop to the insurance and pharmaceutical companies in this country. The program fostered by these three groups is nothing more than a plan to have the same insurance companies providing coverage for uninsured and underinsured people though a mandatory program, paid for through considerable federal funding, all would be covered under a massive group plan. This is simply a huge give away to the health care industry and the real travesty is that two of the players in this trio are "supposed" to be advocates for the "common" people.

Nothing in this program would change with regard to the cost factors, they would continue to increase with alarming percentage increases and with shorter frequencies.

Nothing would change in the quality of health care, we would still not be able to know when a doctor was less than skilled or had killed other patients through negligence.

The only thing that would come out of a plan like this is that the insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies would receive a windfall in revenue and profit increases and the federal government would be paying out more and more each year due to a lack of controls on costs.

Incidentally, do you recall the Medicare Plan D abomination that AARP supported, saying it was better than nothing and could be fixed later? Well lo and behold, the AARP now has their own plan for seniors on Plan D and it puts millions into their coffers at the expense of the people they are SUPPOSED to represent!!! Some sick joke on us, huh?

Say, you don't suppose they would be offering a program for health insurance under this new program they are trying to stick us all with? Surely not, this is a senior citizen advocacy organization, it is not a profit mongering whore to the health care industry, the pharmaceutical industry and other large greed hogs who feed off the American people and give minimal in return. Certainly not OUR AARP!!!

America Brings up the Rear

We have been behind the curve for way more than 30 years regarding health care access in this country. Every single developed country in the world, save the US and South Africa, have long ago, implemented a single payer universal health care program. These programs provide access to medical, dental and medical appliance services to ALL people who are citizens of that country. In all of these countries, the SP-UHC program is extended to visitors who become sick or injured while on a visit to that country. Some times, they are billed and in others no bill is presented. What happens here? Well, thousands die every day because we ration health care in the most insidious way possible, we deny it to literally millions of Americans.

In the United States, we spend 16 percent of our gross domestic product (GDP -- the total value of goods and services) on healthcare and still we have millions of citizens without access to healthcare. The European Union countries spend on average less than 10 percent of their GDPs on healthcare and cover everyone. And their citizens live longer and healthier than we do.

It is truly shocking that the real facts about health care in the United States PROVE the system is broken. What is even more shocking and increases my personal level of rage is that 99% of the discussions on health care reform by those who are charged with doing something about it, are also broken. These people are talking about treatment, not about a cure.

Their programs are all about putting bandaids on a sucking chest wound!!!

We need to get up off our collective butts as an irate citizenry and communicate with the people who are coming up for the '08 elections. Not just the presidential wannabes but with all candidates for office in the federal and state governments. Want to be a Congressional Representative in the House? Listen to the people regarding SP-UHC. Want to be a Senator? Listen to the people regarding SP-UHC. Want to KEEP your current job in the Congress? LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE REGARDING SP-UHC!!

First of all, and this is one thing for certain, we need to inform these people that we believe the following to be a preliminary start to an American Health Care Access Bill of Rights:

- Health Care is a RIGHT for all Americans, it is NOT a consumer product.
- Every American Citizen or Legal Resident should have access to comprehensive health care.
- Health Care access should be funded from a single public source, not private corporations.
- Preventative Health Care practices should be the primary goal of any reformation of healthcare
- No Citizen of the United States should EVER die from lack of access to health care
- No Child should ever suffer in pain and misery because their parent cannot afford medical or dental treatment
- Every medical practitioner, regardless of status, must be subject to professional review
- The American Medical Association will NOT conduct healthcare professional reviews.
- No Insurance organization will be allowed involvement with the healthcare professions

Secondly, we need to get out there and tell them again and again that we are angry with their bending over for the health care profit mongers. Hell, even the so called non-profits are dropping millions of dollars into the pockets of their executives and worse, into the coffers of our elected officials. You know, those people we keep sending to Washington, DC and to the State Houses all over the country, to represent us, and our interests.

A big problem that we will have to overcome with regard to single payer universal health care access is that so many people have been chumped and they accept the status quo. Why do seemingly intelligent people roll over and accept a substandard health care system, simply they have been intimidated by right wingers and industry water carriers saying that single-payer universal healthcare is socialism, smacks of "pinko communism." All the while these self same scumbags are pushing for more corporate welfare, subsidies for energy companies and extolling the virtues of the private sector and the capitalist way. These rightwing naysayers also make our pitches for single payer universal healthcare into a "lefty" unAmerican doctrine and totally ignores the fact that other capitalistic democracies many of whom are very conservative, yet they all have universal healthcare.

What's up with that?

What about the Senior Citizens?

As for the mature citizens who might be reading this long drawn out diatribe, we need to once again start exercising our GREY POWER! We once were a force to be reckoned with! We still are the highest percentage of voters within all the demographic segments in the country. Do you not think that the SP-UHC program would NOT benefit you?

Wouldn't it be a benefit for you to be able to go to ANY doctor, or dentist, or ENT or optical clinic and have your needs addressed? No longer hearing that they are not taking ANY MORE MEDICARE patients? Wouldn't it be a benefit to you to visit a doctor's office and not receive a shocking bill in the mail for payments not covered? What about the benefit of being able to go into a pharmacy and having your prescriptions filled for the dosages the doctor prescribed and not having to ask them to cut the amount to reduce your costs?

I know I would love to have the ability to receive care, pharmaceutical prescriptions or medically necessary appliances such as hearing aids or dentures without having to worry if I can do that and still have enough money left over for food!! I also know that I would want that same access to my children and especially for my grand children. Frankly, I am ashamed that our seniors have not taken a more proactive role in this important health care issue.

I will tell you that the Senior Citizens Consortium is going to be more and more active in this advocacy for Single Payer Universal Health Care and we will be contacting our elected representatives and those candidates who are sniffing around for our votes. We will, even if the AARP will not, take the side of senior citizens and others in this fight for a right to health care.

Where are the Presidential Candidates?

We now have a full scale competition for the position of President of the United States. There is a huge plethora of candidates on both sides of the major party aisle. Some who are truly viable and others who are simply stirring up the waters because they don't stand a ghost of a chance in a national election. However, they all have one thing in common and that is that they all need to present viable programs that the American people are interested in and will support. Universal Health Care based on a single point of payment is, or should be, one of those issues or programs.

The truly sad thing is that all of the candidates, save Mr Dennis Kucinich, are touting their version of universal health care and these versions are 180 degrees from where they should be. Each and everyone, except Dennis has simply modified the for profit insurance and provider negotiation environment with a mandate for ALL people to have health care insurance. Nothing could be further from what needs to be happening.

I was truly disappointed when the Democratic candidates all started spouting the Health Care Industry line of expanding the care through expanding the insurance and HMO theft. Clinton, Obama, Edwards, Biden, Richardson, well you get the picture,, ALL of these so called Democrats have totally bought into or have been bought by, the insurance and health care industry. While that stuff is expected from the Republican candidates, it was and is truly disappointing that the Democrats are not stepping up to the plate for all Americans.

What happened to the core principles of the Democratic Party?

The Republicans are now totally owned and operated by the far right conservative leg of the party and these people are all water carriers for the insurance, medical, and pharmaceutical lobbies in this area. Republicans have not cared a whit for the average American for so long that no one can even remember when that might have been the case. So don't look to the Republicans to help in this area, they are going to fight it tooth and nail and will bring in their pals in the industry with the deep pockets to present lies and half truths to once again defeat a chance at a reasonable health care access program. Remember the Harry and Louise lying ads on TV and Radio? Who do you think put up the millions of dollars for those lies?

Certainly wasn't the American people.

So if one were to ask the question posed by the title of this section, Where are the candidates? Well, they certainly are not in synch with a majority of Americans who are clamoring for a true resolution to the health care situation in the United States. Conservative (Gad I hate to use that word anymore) estimates indicates that more than 64 percent of the American people would like to see a viable single payer health care access program implemented across the country. Piecemeal efforts such as the California program are good starters, but the Federal Government, through our DO NOTHING congress needs to step up to the plate and heed the demands of Americans for SP-UHC.

Some Politicians are listening?

Now we understand that the Congressional Representative from Michigan, Mr. John Conyers has been pushing a bill for several years (mostly under the Republican do nothing for the people Congress) and is once more attempting to bring it to the fore. This bill, HR676 does not fully meet the criteria that we in the SCC through several members postings, including myself and NEactuary, have been striving to have implemented, but it does take us a long way down the road to the final goal of health care for all and the removal of profit mongering health insurance/HMO greed hogs from the health care trough.

Conyers' bill would essentially take a set of health care programs currently in place (Medicare, medicaid, etc) and expand them to accomodate the concept of Single Payer Universal Health Care. HR 676 is not a long drawn out bill, you don't need to be a lawyer to read and understand. If I recall correctly, it is only 14 pages long. It does

essentially everything that we have been calling for, but still leaves a tiny bit to be desired. Best of all, this HR 676 bill will remove, by law, all private insurance organizations, including HMO's from the health care area. The only HMO's who would be allowed to remain are those that actually provide care within their own facilities.

Also, in California, the state Senate re-passed a bill on June 7 called SR840 that is another version of a single payer health care program. The Governor "AHNOLD" vetoed the original bill when it was approved by the California Legislators before and sent to his desk. Now the bill has been brought back to life and passed by the California Senate. It is now headed for the California House for consideration. We have a link to the web site for the OneCareNow.org web site which supports this bill and provides significant information regarding the bill and its current status. Check out the SCC's home page and the link is at the bottom of the page.

Our Place as a Country in Health Care

For more than 30 years, the United States has served as a "control subject" for the rest of the developed countries of the world and some developing countries. For this period of time, we have exemplified the drawback to privately funded/operated health care programs. We have shown the world that health care as a consumer product does not work. We have exhibited to the world that the for profit insurance and health maintenance organizations are a detriment to the health of the citizenry.

Think about that folks! We, the most powerful, wealthiest country in the world serves as an example to the rest of the world as to the WRONG way to implement and maintain health care for its citizens. Consider that we spend more than 6,500 dollars per person in the US for health care each year and this is at minimum, more than three times what health care in the rest of the world costs. But you might say, we are getting a better level of care for that high dollar cost? Wrong, kemo sabe. In point of fact our health care system has lower patient outcomes than virtually all of the developed countries.

The French spend less than a third of the amount on healthcare than the US and their health care outcomes are far superior to ours. The French health system is rated by the World Health Organization as being in 1st place among all countries. The United States? We rank in 38th place! Our health care system costs three or four times as much per individual, yet we have lower outcomes. Our life expectancy is lower than 37 other countries, our childbirth survival rate is lower than 36 other countries and our overall citizen satisfactory ratings are lower than these other 37 countries. Canada, which ranks near the lower group with regard to SP-UHC has a superior health care system to the US and it ranks higher on the outcomes ratings that we do by far.

We spend billions of dollars uselessly on paperwork to process claims for health care. It has been indicated that the US could save over 300 billion dollars on administrative paperwork and activities under a single payer program per year and that savings would start immediately upon adoption of a single payer plan. Compounding this situation is

that payment for claims to providers continues to escalate with most doctors and clinicians waiting weeks if not months for payment on claims.

Couple all these factors with the fact that the number of companies who provide group insurance is growing smaller and smaller each year. It is becoming more costly each year, both to the companies and to their employees who pay a higher percentage of the premium costs every time the insurance companies increase their premiums. As a result many companies are dropping the benefit. My company was recently hit with a 35% annual increase in our premium and we had to change providers to simply make the increase have a bit more value than with the prior company. A growing number of companies are reducing or stopping their health insurance plans altogether because of exorbitant increases. Premiums paid by business in this country increased 73% in the five year period between 2000 and 2005!

Now consider the Health Savings Account (HSA) programs touted by the Bush Administration as the solution to the health care crisis for companies. Under HSA, Bush claims that Americans will OWN their health care and be able to buy the more cost effective treatments. Road Apples, that is a huge lie. You do not shop for health care, when one is ill, they need care now. You don't start calling various doctors and clinics soliciting bids for an appendectomy!!

Of all the lies that the Bush Administration has uttered to the American people, this HSA program is the single biggest fraud to be perpetrated since the Medicare Part D debacle the Bankruptcy Reform, the "Reform" of Social Security and the Iraq invasion.

These HSA programs would have the employees set aside a portion of their incomes each pay period to cover health care expenses. They would then be offered a very high deductible "catastrophic" health insurance plan (\$5,000 minimum deductible) to cover the slack. This supposedly will "ENCOURAGE" the American citizen to be a better health care consumer/shopper. Horse Pucky! Health Care is NOT, let me repeat that, HEALTH CARE IS NOT a consumer product. It is, at least everywhere but the United States, a RIGHT of Citizenship!! Many of the right winger claim that the SP UHC programs in these other countries ration all health care. First of all, that is a flat out, bare faced lie, but also we ration care in this country in a most insidious way, we deny it to the poor.

Besides, once again this program like so many others will simply isolate a larger percentage of our population who will no longer have access to health care, because they don't earn enough money to make an HSA feasible. So we can expect our uninsured and endangered citizenry to grow well past the 47 million that we know of today! There's a great legacy for The Decider!

Medical Care and Health Insurance Horror Stories

For many people in the US, the health care accessibility situation is a true medical crisis.

Consider the man who was thrown out of the George Washington Hospital with an IV still in his arm following knee surgery! The reason? He had no medical insurance so he wound up with being literally tossed out of a hospital on his butt and with a \$100,000 dollar medical claim against him.

Think about people who wait, postponing needed treatment because they have no access to medical insurance and do not have enough in savings or income to pay the costly bills. One woman postponed needed surgery until she could find another job that had medical insurance plans. It took her over two years.

Think about the recent news concerning hospitals in California who took patients, most still in their hospital gowns, and dumped them into the Skid Row areas of LA.

Consider the woman who lay on the floor of a large hospital's emergency room and BLED TO DEATH!!

And finally, consider the approximately 18,000 people who die each YEAR because they do not have access to medical coverage.

And this is supposed to be representative of a CARING nation?

Your homework assignment? Take a look at Congressman Conyers' HR676 National Health Care Legislation:

<http://maturecommunications.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/06/hr676ihnationalhealthcare.pdf>

Also, go to our Senior Citizens Consortium home page and click on the OneCareNow link to read about the California Plan.

<http://maturecommunications.com>

Then get involved, either with us, the Senior Citizens Consortium or with someone else. Contact your representatives, both at the federal and local levels. Let them know you are aware of the SP-UHC potential and that you expect them to take action.

We will be happy to work with anyone who is serious about moving this country to joining with the other developed countries in providing universal, single point of payment, and cost effective health care for all. Just contact us either at the email box,

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or leave a comment on the blog entry that brought you to this paper.