

Editorial:

Freedom and DEATH in Medicine

Lawrence R. Huntoon, M.D., Ph.D.

We have come to the crossroads of freedom and DEATH in medicine.

D Is for Dependency

According to a recent analysis by the Heritage Foundation, we are approaching a situation where approximately one-third of people in this country pay no taxes for the government benefits many vote to receive. Between 2001 and 2007, the Index of Government Dependency increased by 30 percent, with the medical component increasing by 25 percent. Over the next 10 years, spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security is predicted to increase by approximately 65 percent, fueling a \$53 trillion debt.¹

Those who have had an increasing share of their income confiscated by government have essentially been punished for their hard work and success, and as a result of oppressive taxation have less ability to save and provide for their own needs. As the discretionary income of the working public declines, people have fewer choices, and government soon becomes the only choice available. And, as working people have more of their income confiscated by government, the American Dream of getting ahead by working hard evaporates, and the incentive to work is destroyed.

Dependency also leads to loss of reason and logic. Afraid to face the reality that Medicare is financed via a giant Ponzi scheme that is doomed to collapse, dependent citizens cling to the notion that medical care is a right. The so-called social contract between generations is in reality an inter-generational socialist scam. Yet, in a plea for magical thinking, dependent citizens have been led to believe that somehow enough savings can be found in a program facing insolvency to finance medical care for millions of uninsured citizens.

E Is for Entitlement

Government entitlements are expanding at an alarming rate. Dependent citizens, who have lost all hope of providing for their own needs through their own labor, have turned to government to make them equal. The socialist concept that all should share in wealth and health equally has become pervasive. Providing for one's own needs through one's own industry and labor, and concerning oneself about maintaining one's own good health have become virtually irrelevant. Why work hard or worry about the consequences of excessive drinking and smoking when government promises to "cover" whatever predictable economic adversity or health calamity may befall you? Equal health, of course, cannot be achieved.

Socialists claim that if only government would provide equal access to medical care via "universal coverage," we could achieve the socialist utopia of good health for all. Wealth as a community property is the proposed financing mechanism often cited in the tired and worn socialist slogan: We are the wealthiest country in the world, yet we don't provide for the medical care of our citizens.

Socialists believe that communities, not individuals who work for a living, are the rightful owners of wealth. Socialists consistently ignore the reality that all countries with socialized medicine have government-rationed medicine. And as the actual words "rationing" and "death panels" likely do not overtly appear in laws that created socialized medicine in other countries, they are deemed by socialists not to exist. People who get sick in countries with socialized medicine also are well aware that coverage is not the same as timely or equal access to care.

A Is for Apathy

A distorted market, in which patients, physicians, and others who provide medical care have been insulated from its actual cost, has created a state of apathy such that none of the parties to the transaction care what it costs. Cost inflation has been the predictable outcome. Government price controls, implemented to control costs in Medicare and other government health programs, have led to government rationing of medical care—pay for performance, comparative-effectiveness research, bundling of separate medical services, and a host of other cost-containment schemes, none of which contain the actual word "rationing."

Physicians, who have become dependent on government medical programs for economic survival, spend their days trying to cope with a growing number of government regulations that impede and interfere with nearly every aspect of the practice of medicine, to the detriment of patient care. Physician survival depends on creating an optimal billing record, as opposed to providing optimal care according to the physician's training and judgment. The "game" is to obtain optimal reimbursement without triggering the scrutiny of private bounty hunters who prowl electronic records looking for any irregularity that might be construed as overpayment or fraud. Patient care has become almost incidental to the primary transaction between physician and government.

Apathy is also the coping mechanism that many dependent physicians use to allay anxieties about increasing difficulty making a decent living under inadequate fees dictated by government, and threats of ruin by Medicare bounty hunters. The dependent physician's focus is on making it through the day, paying the bills, and not worrying about the future. Besides, worrying about the future of medicine is considered by many government-dependent physicians to be "too political." Apathy, however, often leads to tyranny.

T Is for Tyranny

Tyranny is the destruction of freedom. Despite promises by Congress not to exercise any supervision or control over the practice of medicine or the compensation of those who provide medical services (Sec. 1801 of the Social Security Act), Medicare bureaucrats now dictate what care is medically necessary and what is not, and the fee that can be charged for each covered medical service. The voluntary aspect of the Medicare program was exterminated long ago by government. The current default mode, according to

government, is that physicians are subject to the dictates of Medicare bureaucrats unless they “opt out” of the program. Increasingly, physicians are wisely opting out of Medicare.

And, although Congress promised that Medicare-entitled beneficiaries would not be prohibited from obtaining private health insurance (Sec. 1803 of the SSA), the “public option” known as Medicare destroyed the private insurance market, making the “public option” the only “option” available. Government health programs do not compete with private industry; they eliminate the private-sector competition.

Tyranny is also incompatible with free speech. In an attempt to intimidate and squelch opposition to socialist health plans recently being developed in Congress, citizens were encouraged to report those who spoke out against socialist tyranny; such speech was deemed to be “fishy” by the current administration. AAPS took action by filing a lawsuit against the Obama administration, in support of free speech. In the meantime, the administration sought to boycott Fox News because of its adamant stance on reporting news and not propaganda approved by the White House. In a striking rebuke of the administration’s actions, other news agencies, including liberal ones, refused to support the administration’s blatant attempt to suppress freedom of the press.

Recently, government has even challenged the fundamental principle of who owns your body. Some states have attempted to implement forced vaccinations, against the consent and will of individual citizens. Thus in some cases, government has taken the position that it owns your body and it will decide what medical treatments you will be forced to take. Blatant violations of our U.S. Constitution are simply glossed over in the name of the socialist “common good.”

H Is for Holocaust

The history of socialism is clear. Socialism brings misery and destruction to those who are forced to live under it, and socialized medicine, a.k.a. the “public option,” if implemented, will destroy freedom in medicine. Without freedom in medicine, there is no quality, only compliance. Compliance with one-size-fits-all, government-approved protocols and guidelines for the purpose of saving money in the government-run program will bring suffering to individual patients whose individual illnesses do not fit those protocols and guidelines. In the socialist tradition, individual citizens will be sacrificed for “the good of the state.” The sacrifice and suffering of individual patients on a massive scale “for the good of the state” would represent a true holocaust.

Many believe we have already reached a tipping point where so many people are able to vote themselves benefits, for which they pay little or nothing, that the very survival of our constitutional republic is at risk.

Since 1943, AAPS has remained firm in its support of freedom in medicine, free markets, and preservation of the sacrosanct patient-physician relationship. Irrespective of what injury Congress may decide to inflict on the American people in the name of “healthcare reform,” AAPS will continue to fight to preserve freedom in medicine, as freedom is the very essence of private medicine.

REFERENCE

¹ Beach W. *The 2008 Index of Government Dependency*. Center for Data Analysis, Heritage Foundation, Oct 23, 2008. Available at: www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/cda08-08.cfm. Accessed Oct 25, 2009.

Lawrence R. Huntoon, M.D., Ph.D., is a practicing neurologist and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*. Contact: editor@jpands.org.

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