

From the Archives: To All My Patients

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EXPLANATION:

Dr. Ruth M. Bain (Austin, Texas), general practitioner and surgeon, realizing that her fellow physicians were aware of the hazards of socialized medicine but perhaps that her patients were not, sent the letter, reprinted in this pamphlet, to all of her patients. Each was signed individually by her. The original letter was printed in the September, 1960, issue of the Travis County (Austin) Medical Society journal; a shortened version of it was reprinted in the *Texas State Journal of Medicine*, November, 1960.

We are reprinting the letter in its entirety because we believe it charts a course of action for every ethical physician who is concerned over the future of medical practice.

To All My Patients:

It is now 4 a.m. I have just talked by phone with a patient and, I believe, relieved her anxiety. She will no doubt be back asleep before I am. I wonder how well this will work some 10 years, or perhaps less from now, when the government will probably be between me and my patient.

Ridiculous? No! A very likely possibility in my opinion. Not because the American people want it, but because of lack of information and concern about what is happening to us—lethargy on the part of the public. I am greatly disturbed by the fact that every candidate aspiring to the presidency this year has come out for some form of government paid-for (socialized) medicine—admittedly on a limited basis at this time—but how long will it stay limited? If precedence set in other legislation is followed, and I have no doubt that it will be, the scope of the program will be broadened each election year.

This year it is all for “the aged.” Nobody knows what the needs of the aged are, but it has a tremendous emotional appeal. Everybody—[who lives] long enough—will very probably have some health problem. Is this their greatest problem? Many of those I see have health problems produced primarily by loneliness and lack of a feeling of being needed. Some have nutritional problems—not because of lack of available food—but lack of someone to eat with, or prepare it. Will government medicine change this?

The medical profession has been and is being accused of selfish interests in [our] efforts to defeat or delay socialized medicine. This

is without basis in fact. Do you know of any other profession[als] whose every effort is toward elimination of need for their services? The medical profession is made up of rugged individualists—this is the type of person who makes a good doctor. It takes a fair amount of ruggedness (guts, if you wish) to carry the responsibility and make the decisions necessary to practice medicine. This type individual does not tolerate regimentation. I am convinced that when socialized medicine has been accomplished that the type of individual who chooses to go into medicine will change—and not for the best. Regimentation has a leveling effect—it breeds mediocrity. This will eliminate the type of progress that has added 20 years to our average life expectancy in the last 50 years.

Is it selfishness that prompts me to fight these developments that not only are distasteful to the point of nausea to me but that I feel will be bad for everybody concerned—especially the future generations who will be paying the bills? Did you know that social security taxes by 1970 are already scheduled to reach the rate of 9% without any broadening of the program? And are you aware that in Sweden 25% (¼) of all paychecks is withheld for social security including the socialized medicine program of that country? Do you spend one week’s salary per month paying medical bills?

It is my very earnest desire to stimulate you to find out more about bills before your congress and to make your wishes known to your elected representatives. If you want socialized medicine, fine—I hope you will be happy! But if you do not, you must actively work to avoid it—or you will get it piecemeal over the next five to ten years by default. It is very nearly a reality at this time.

I sincerely hope enough of those interested in preserving the American way of life will be stimulated to action. The present system admittedly has defects—but then we are only human!

“It’s not enough to do good; it is necessary to fight evil.”

St. Augustine

“The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in time of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.”

Dante Alighieri

“Most fortunate indeed, whenever it happens that the physician is both, perfect in his art and most excellent in his moral conduct. But if one of the two should have to be missing, then it is better to be a good man devoid of learning than to be a perfect practitioner of bad moral conduct, and an untrustworthy man – if indeed it is true that good morals compensate for what is missing in art, while bad morals can corrupt and confound even perfect art.”

Erasistratus