

**Journal of American Physicians
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Typesetting and Printing
A Plus Printing
Tucson, AZ

Website
www.jpands.org

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*Journal of American Physicians
and Surgeons* (ISSN 1543-4826)
is published quarterly.

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Legal Care

The article by Dr. Rice on “LegalCare”¹ is one of the most timely and important pieces I have read in a long time.

Unfortunately, this tongue-in-cheek article, which is so painfully true, will fall on deaf ears. No one is even considering tort reform in any of the proposed “healthcare reform” bills.

The legal profession deserves to be lampooned, as lawyers are largely responsible for much of the decline in medical ethics as well as that of the legal system itself.

Congratulations to Dr. Rice for exposing the hypocrisy of legal professionals who advocate enslaving physicians in the supposed interest of affordable, accessible care (under government control), yet who bristle at the idea that the same principle should apply to them.

John J. Alpar, M.D.
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¹ Rice MS. LegalCare: It is Time to Lower Legal Costs and Ensure Affordable, Accessible Legal Coverage for All. *J Am Phys Surg* 2009;14:110-112.

The Cost of Medical Care

Most people have been conditioned to believe that there is no way that they can pay for medical care. In one talk I give, I ask people how much a routine office visit with a pediatrician or internist would cost. Generally the response is dead silence. Everyone knows his copay, but beyond that simply believes that the real cost is so much that it would bankrupt him. He believes that because it is the only thing he ever hears. The left has been cultivating the notion that only government can pay for medical care since Medicare was passed in the 1960s—even though, as Dr. Summers shows, Medicare was actually a primary cause of the soaring costs.¹ Reversing this level of brainwashing is not going to be quick or easy.

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The article by Dr. Summers¹ leads one to ask why socialism must fail. The answer, known for centuries and never refuted, is the absence of real prices.

Mankind will always face the problem of scarcity. The language of real prices transmits the personal knowledge of billions of people to bring about the best possible allocation of scarce resources.

A price is a ratio of subjective valuations. For example, 100 bags of wheat might be traded for one cow, reflecting the values of the buyer and the seller. No central planner can know enough to determine these values.

The Spanish Scholastics wrote: “Regulation of prices by the authorities or by guilds sooner or later produces incorrect prices and a distorted market.”² This defense of free markets in the 1500s long predated the days of so-called exploitative capitalism in the 1800s.

In 1922, Ludwig von Mises explained that even if men were angels they would require the language of real prices to coordinate the dispersal of limited resources in a complex society. It is not greed that hobbles the process of economizing, but rather the absence of communication of information that only individuals working in the trenches can know.³

Recently, Hunter Lewis reiterated the same theme: “The central paradox of Keynesianism is that it attempts to ‘fix’ the price and profit system—by subverting it.”⁴

The alternative to empowering individuals, including patients, to transmit their knowledge or valuations is to entrust bureaucrats to arbitrarily determine prices. As Thomas Sowell pointed out, “The simple fact that central planners in the Soviet Union had more than 24 million prices to set shows the absurdity of the task undertaken by central planning.”⁵

The U.S. government mandated CPT codes and Resource-based Relative Value Scale are eerily reminiscent of the Soviet pseudo-pricing system. Government interference destroys the patient-physician contract along with real prices.

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¹ Summers WK. The Effect of OPM (Other People’s Money) on Medicine. *J Am Phys Surg* 2009;14:118-119.

² Woods TE Jr. *The Church and the Market, a Catholic Defense of the Free Market Economy*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books; 2005:44.

³ Von Mises L. *Socialism*. 6th ed. Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Fund; 1981.

⁴ Lewis L. *Where Keynes Went Wrong and Why World Governments Keep Creating Inflation, Bubbles, and Busts*. Mount Jackson, Va.: Axios Press; 2009.

⁵ Sowell T. *Intellectuals and Society*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books; 2010:25.

Erratum

In Table 2 on p 105 of Indur Goklany’s article on death and death rates from extreme weather events,¹ the total number of deaths should be **57,029** (in thousands), that is 57,029,000, not 7,029 (thousand), as the table reads. We apologize for what was apparently a printer’s error, and we thank a reader for calling it to our attention

¹ Goklany IM. Deaths and death rates from extreme weather events: 1900-2008. *J Am Phys Surg* 2009;14:102-109