



Many children must deal with a loss of healthcare

Price Controls on Drugs Would Be Inhumane
Price Controls Mean Many Would Suffer Or Die
Unnecessarily

By Ron Trowbridge

I am driven by gratitude to share with the world a story about a miracle - a miracle created by man, but miraculous nonetheless.

Recently my wife was diagnosed with stage 4 inoperable non-smoker's non small cell lung cancer. The five-year prognosis for lung cancer survival is 15 percent. We felt it was a death sentence, and were consumed with grief every waking and sleepless moment.

Clinging to hope, my wife agreed to a clinical drug trial conducted by the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, testing a new growth inhibitor manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline.

In just eight short weeks we had the initial findings: the inhibitor had shrunk the lung tumor by at least 10 percent! If that is not a man-made miracle, nothing is.

If and when this drug goes on the market, it will be expensive. But, frankly, I would gladly pay any cost for a drug that keeps my soulmate of 42 years alive. She is worth more than all the money I have.

This miracle turns me to the current issue of the high price of drugs and price controls. I believe to the heart's core that government-mandated price controls on drugs would be inhumane - yes, inhumane. Let me explain why.

Not long ago I came across an article by E.O. Wilson, former professor of biology at Harvard University and author of two Pulitzer-prize winning books. He said that of all the species in the universe, "fewer than 2 million are in the scientific register" and that "an estimated 5 million to 100 million - or more - await discovery."

"Medicine," he added, "is a domain that stands to gain enormously from the world's store of biodiversity," and that "only a tiny fraction of biodiversity has been utilized in medicine." There is, Professor Wilson adds, a "pharmacological bounty of wild species... [and] all kinds of organisms have evolved chemicals needed to control cancer in their own bodies, kill parasites and fight off predators."

My point is obvious: If drug companies are restricted by price controls, if they are not able to

realize a meaningful profit, they will have no incentive to take huge risks and invest prodigious sums of money in finding cures to human diseases.

In the remaining 100 million species yet to be discovered might be the cure for Alzheimer's or AIDS or cancer, but they would remain largely untapped. This neglect would be inhumane - not to us in the immediate present - but to countless numbers of us when we're older, and to our children and grandchildren.

The American Cancer Society reports five-year survival rates for the 15 most common cancers rose from 43 percent in men and 57 percent in women in 1979, to 64 percent in both sexes in 2000. New drugs are a major factor in this dramatic increase.

In addition to my wife's miracle, I am myself a beneficiary of a miraculous drug. I had suffered severe atrial fibrillation, where my heart could be seen literally banging in my chest up to 12 hours a day, where I had difficulty breathing, where I was terrified.

One pill, taken once a day, stopped the symptoms entirely.

It is now a generic drug and it is now dirt cheap. But that cheapness was not always the case. Ten, 20 or 30 years ago, it was expensive. It had to be because a drug company needed to take the risk and spend of millions of dollars in research and development to discover this miraculous medication. It might well have been, so to speak, a dry hole.

I thank God price controls were not in effect back then, possibly precluding discovery of this drug and preventing countless millions today - like me - from having it.

When we ask for mandated price controls now, we understandably serve our immediate interests, but we do so at the expense of our progeny. For poor people who desperately need expensive drugs right now, let's find a way to solve that problem without the destructiveness of price controls.

In the meantime, my wife and I and countless millions thank with unfathomable gratitude the drug companies for giving us the most precious thing we have - our lives.

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