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Your personal health threatened by government-run health care

By Elizabeth Young, Guest Columnist

Much of the recent health care debate has focused on the ballooning federal deficit, likely tax increases, and the number of uninsured and all of these are certainly important to consider.

But the most important impact health care reform will have is on your personal health, and this particular issue has not received enough attention. It seems some in America take their current ability to make their own health care choices for granted.

Sure, it is expensive to afford unforeseen medical crises, and Congress is correct in identifying the high cost of health care as a problem that should be addressed. However, government-run health care is not the solution. In countries where this approach has been tried, people lose their ability to make personal health care decisions since certain medical options are simply unavailable.

Despite how well-intentioned some may be in pushing for government-run health care, their proposals would result in more harm than good. Health care will likely be rationed, quality of care will eventually decrease, and the patient-doctor relationship will be separated by a wall of bureaucracy.

Government-run health care systems that contain President Obama's overall goals already exist in various nations all over the world, the most notable being in Canada and the United Kingdom (U.K.). So, have citizens in those nations retained control over their livelihood?

Take, for instance, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), the government board that makes health care treatment decisions based on comparative effectiveness research in the U.K. In total, "61 percent of cancer treatments (27 of the 44 appraised) have been denied by U.K.'s NICE" on the basis that they were not economically feasible regardless of their medical success. Alternatively, in the United States, anyone who needs cancer treatment has access to various treatment options for a price.

The U.K. has even been sued by several young women who developed cervical cancer after being denied pap smears by the government. NICE refuses to screen women under the age of 25 due to cost concerns.

Perhaps the most startling fact is that "the World Health Organization estimates that 25,000 British cancer patients die prematurely every year because of restrictions" to various medical treatments.

In Canada, 10,000 breast cancer patients have "filed a class action lawsuit against Quebec's hospitals because, on average, they were forced to wait 60 days to begin post-operative radiation treatments." Even Canada's Supreme Court has recognized that rationing has caused major problems in Canada. In the 2005 case Chaoulli v. Quebec, the majority opinion stated: "The evidence in this case shows that delays in the public health care system are widespread, and that, in some serious cases, patients die as a result of waiting lists for public health care."

Problems similar to this could eventually develop in the United States if a plan containing President Obama's objectives becomes law. Let's learn from others' mistakes and not repeat history. Government-run health care has been tried before and universally failed.

Yes, health care is expensive in America, but at least it is available and patients have options. It is not possible to maintain this luxury when government is put in control of our personal health care decisions, many of which can mean life or death. These reforms won't improve your life; they only threaten it.

Elizabeth Young is a health care policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-profit, free-market research institute based in Austin.



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