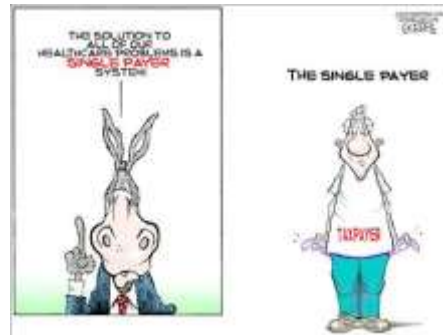


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IS HEALTHCARE A RIGHT? SHOULD “SINGLE- PAYER” BE A GOAL?

By Stephen L. Bakke  July 5, 2017



Is Healthcare a Right? Should “Single-Payer” Be a Goal?

Healthcare payment system reform is facing gridlock in Washington. Some have brought up the possibility of “solving it all” with a single-payer system. That has been the goal of many democrats for years. They identify healthcare as a “right” and declare “single-payer” as inevitable.

Is Healthcare a Right?

When discussing “rights,” it’s appropriate to refer to the U.S. Constitution because we should have a standard – a benchmark. Consider the following:

- Quality healthcare shouldn’t be debated on a constitutional basis. That introduces an argument that will never produce agreement.
- In fact, there’s confusion over what “right” is being debated. Is it insurance coverage, or is it quality outcomes? That distinction isn’t being made.
- It’s tempting to attribute to all “good policies” the designation of “inalienable rights,” as described in our founding documents. However, those Constitutional Rights were endowed by our creator and can’t be “bought and sold.” Healthcare service is something very different.

Let’s agree that quality healthcare is, quite simply, a good thing. Let’s also agree it’s worth the expenditure of great effort and resources, and that it should be available to all.

The Single-Payer System

Creating the right “payment” method, brings up the democrat’s ideal – the single-payer system. Consider the following:

- A “single-payer” system is technically a “monopsony.” That implies many “sellers” but only one “buyer” – in this case the government.
- In theory, the government would set prices for all healthcare services. Unfortunately, the exclusive purchaser of healthcare would also control distribution and access. That’s not good!
- Consider the Charlie Gard controversy in London. The 11 month-old is terminally ill with a rare genetic disorder. The British government won’t let Charlie’s parents bring him to the U.S. for experimental treatment, or even bring him home to die. The family would pay all expenses. The government does this because it funds their single-payer system and has that authority.

- Government domination stifles innovation, discourages competition, and distances the consumer from decision-making.

Consider this alternative:

- Our insurance market has never been a “free marketplace.” Rather than facilitating a marketplace, the government has fiddled and meddled and ended up with something we all complain about. And the consumer is “kept out of the loop.”
- The best opportunity for efficient and intelligent cost savings is a free and transparent market. That happens when the consumer is involved with the decision and payment process.
- In light of this let’s consider individual policy ownership, and limiting the insurance coverage to major medical coverage.
- Supplementing the insurance companies, individuals or families would have Health Savings Accounts for their “first dollar coverage” – up to \$10,000 for example.

There’s no room here for describing the necessary transition rules, tax favored treatments, and many other details, but this is the direction I believe reform should take. We must reject single payer proposals and move healthcare decisions closer to consumers.

Let’s not waste time arguing about whether healthcare is a right. Our creator endowed us with wisdom to solve many challenges by ourselves, and this is one of them.