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TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC" UNIVERSAL HEALTHCARE AND "SINGLE PAYER": CANADA AND OTHER PLACES



By Stephen L. Bakke  January 1, 2015

Here's what provoked me:

This is a continuation of the prior "Short Topic" about "Universal Healthcare and 'Single Payer.'" It's a huge topic and the question a writer asked couldn't be adequately covered in 250 words which is the limit. A writer who disagreed with my rejection of "universal/single payer healthcare systems" wanted me to explain why single payer wouldn't work, and used Canada as an example of success.

Here's my response:

Universal Healthcare and "Single Payer": Canada and Other Places

A 12/31 letter ("Still waiting to be told why single-payer plan won't work") opposed my opinion expressed in a 12/29 letter. The writer used Canada as an example of "single payer" success.

Healthcare payment system reform has been needed for decades, but I disagree with the premise for recent approaches for accomplishing it. ACA and "universal/single payer" are rooted in misinterpreted procedures and misleading conclusions from studies by the World Health Organization and The Commonwealth Fund.

Contrary to the conclusions of those studies, the U.S. system compares very favorably with any country chosen for comparison. Regarding Canada and others, take a look at some performance measurements (summarized), largely the result of research by the National Center for Policy Analysis. (For details, visit the NCPA website):

- Americans have much better survival rates than Europeans for common cancers.
- Americans have lower cancer mortality rates than Canadians.
- Americans have better access to chronic disease treatment than patients in other developed countries.
- Americans have better access to preventive cancer screening than Canadians.
- Lower income Americans are in better health than comparable Canadians.
- Canadian and British patients wait about twice as long to see a specialist compared with the U.S.
- Americans are more satisfied with care they receive than Canadians.
- Americans have better access to important new technologies than patients in Canada or the U.K.
- Americans are responsible for the vast majority of healthcare innovations.

Copying other countries isn't the answer. Let's focus on making healthcare cheaper and more efficient – things that are desperately needed.