

Healthcare: Right or Privilege?
By Roman Smart – Utah Valley University

Public Healthcare is absolutely not a right of anyone, but rather a privilege. I plan to illustrate a number of reasons why.

Right VS Privilege

Suppose it's eleven o'clock in the evening and you've just settled into bed after a tiring day of work when the doorbell sounds. You stumble down the poorly lit stairs, making your way to the door to find a dingy, unkempt man holding a torn, cardboard scrap in front of him that reads "Starving, cannot provide food for myself. Help me."

Let's pause and contemplate on the situation: Is it an inalienable right of this man to obtain food from others because he, being fully capable, does not attempt to pursue his own food? Is it a law that you have to welcome this stranger into your home and provide him with sustenance? Absolutely not. How do you know this man is not an imposter, waiting to rob your house or kidnap your daughter? Or simply someone that is perfectly capable of obtaining food but would rather have someone do it for him? Is food a necessity? Of course it is. Does that make it a right of every food-dependent creature to obtain food at another's expense? It is a completely preposterous supposition. Why then, would we assume the "right" to rob a doctor of his personal time to treat us for free? Why would we expect a nation to pay for someone who makes no attempt at providing for themselves? Our nation cannot. It defies that which the nation is predicated upon - Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all. Not happiness to one, at another's expense.

Any healthcare received from our government is a privilege, not a right. Helping a

needy person late at night on our porch may be a civil duty for the just, but by no stretch of the imagination is it a legal obligation. Likewise, any healthcare received from the government should not be an assumed mandate to anyone living in the United States, but assistance provided to those who are in need by a helpful government.

What is a “Right”? "Natural rights embody the concept of individual autonomy and negative rights that are inalienable and inherent to human beings. Natural rights (e.g., life, liberty, the owning and disposing of property, and the pursuit of health, occupation — and happiness), like human rights, can be exercised by all individuals simultaneously without infringing and trampling on the rights of others (i.e., negative rights concept). When governments transcend these rights with welfare rights, entitlements, and redistribution of wealth schemes — in the name of compassion, utilitarianism, or some greater common good — it squarely infringes upon the autonomy and basic rights of individuals and corrupts the negative concept of the law."(1)

In other words we are entitled by law, or we have the "right" to do anything that does not affect anyone else adversely by violating personal rights or endangering them. Is the doctor expected to work for free in order to treat those unwilling to work to pay at least a portion themselves? Should the blue-collared expect to be robbed a portion of their earnings in order to pay for those that a fill-in-the-blank Internet survey decides are unable to sufficiently pay themselves?

If you were a doctor working to pay off loans accrued from costly years of medical school, outrageous insurance rates and high overhead charges, would you not feel violated if forced to work for free? Should we not expect it to be a conscious, independent, decision made by doctors, medical workers and researchers to contribute? "It is the

provision of this service [healthcare] that a doctor depends upon for his livelihood, and his means of supporting his own life. If the right to healthcare belongs to the patient, he starts out owning the services of a doctor without the necessity of either earning them or receiving them as a gift from the only man who has the right to give them, the doctor himself." (2)

Universal Healthcare

According to the Institute of Medicine, The United States is virtually the only wealthy, industrialized nation that does not provide universal health care to its citizens. Universal health care is provided in most developed countries, in many developing countries, and is the trend worldwide. After hearing this, many immediately flock to the bandwagon of bickerers and complainers on the matter. Why would a nation as powerful and intelligent as the United States not offer medical assistance to anyone living within its borders? How can every country on the American Continent south of the Rio Grande offer some form of universal healthcare while the US remains heartlessly aloof?

The answer lies in the same reasoning as to why the United States is so medically advanced. It's the same reason that wealthy foreigners are ironically rushed from these more "compassionate" countries to the US for important medical procedures. Why does America provide the most advanced and widely coveted medical service in the world? Because free-market capitalist forces are able to work to enable the best health care in the world at the lowest rates possible, still ensuring proper care. Without the "excessive profits" of insurance and pharmaceutical companies, (about which the complaining is endless), there would be no funding provided for crucial medical research.

Although readily available in virtually every well-established country outside the

US, and most third-world countries, universal healthcare in these countries is most often sub-standard, and viewed by most of the populace and specialists in the country as "catastrophic, with the main criticism being the awful service, overcrowded hospitals, high deficit of doctors, long waiting lines for scheduling appointments, outdated installations and severe lack of specialists, even in major urban centers, and general lack of basic medicines "(3)

Tyler Winn, a US citizen who lived in Brazil for an extended period of time, spoke on his experience in receiving universal healthcare treatment in Brazil in 2004, when faced with no other option, "I was told to report to a bus station in order to receive some necessary vaccinations. Imagining that I was going to catch a bus that would take me to a doctor's office to receive my treatment, I was rudely awakened when shown a long line of people waiting to enter a door of the dirty bus station where the vaccinations would be administered. After an uncomfortable hour and twenty minute wait, without so much as a chair I entered the small unsanitary room, where I was greeted by mildew-welcoming, green tile floors and a single metal chair against a brown, stained wall. Needless to say, it was another drastic difference from the paper-lined bed of the cozy family doctor's office I was accustomed to growing up. I was once again surprised to see a woman dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, looking less qualified than myself to provide medical attention pulling syringes from an old solid steel refrigerator circa 1955, and sticking the arms of anything that walked through those bus station doors." [4]

The problems of socialized medicine where health care is a supposed "right" do not stop there however: It actually begins to steal your privacy. Let's suppose you are living right now in a country where taxes are withheld from your paycheck in order to pay for equal universal health coverage for all citizens regardless of financial status. Your neighbor is

an adrenaline junky and is constantly checking in to the hospital for treatment of self-inflicted injuries due to dangerous stunts to appease his ego. Your other neighbor will only eat deep fried foods even though the doctor has warned him that costly heart surgeries are inevitable if he doesn't change his eating habits. At work, a friend of yours refuses to wear a seatbelt in his car or a helmet while on his bike because they "cramp his style." Another neighbor, despite an infinite number of ads from anti-tobacco agencies and pleas from family, friends and doctors, refuses to quit smoking. Don't forget the promiscuous college student who opts not to practice safe sex, endangering not only herself but also those with whom she has relations. Suddenly everyone's personal lifestyle becomes the business of every other taxpayer because the nation is working to sustain these unhealthy ways of life.

The very foundation upon which this great nation is based begins to be shaken. Your choice of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" wavers when that choice is put into the system that politicians and bureaucrats deem suitable for the populace. In many countries which use socialized medicine, the choice of what medicine to use or what treatments to receive becomes the choice of the government, and not of the individual.

Nowhere in the world will ever be free from fear, danger, or even desire. There will always be inherent risk no matter what we are doing. Living in a world free of risk, as Nirvana-like as it may sound, is not only impossible, but would limit the choices of those living in it. Likewise, offering cradle-to-grave healthcare sounds very appealing but that doesn't make it a reality or even attainable as long as people choose not to work for it. The only way to attain it would be by negating the choice of the populace. Making healthcare a "right" to all, and disregarding personal choice would only take away an even greater right

- the autonomy of physicians, hospital employees, pharmaceutical researchers, and more importantly, you and I as tax-paying citizens of these United States.

References:

1. Faria MA Jr. Health care as a right. *Medical Warrior: Fighting Corporate Socialized Medicine*. Macon, Georgia, Hacienda Publishing, Inc., 1997, pp.94-103.
2. Sade, Robert M. "Medical Care as a Right: A Refutation" In *Cross Cultural Perspectives In Medical Ethics*, published by Jones and Bartlett Publishers, pp. 179-183
3. [translated from Portuguese] Rietra, Rita de Cassia Paiva. *Inovacoes na gestao em saude mental: urn estudo de caso sobre o CAPS na cidade do Rio de Janeiro*. [Mestrado] Fundacao Oswaldo Cruz, Escola Nacional de Saude Publica; 1999. Pp.125
4. Winn, Tyler N. Personal Interview Conducted by Roman Smart, Nov 2. 2008

Roman Smart will be a senior at Utah Valley University, majoring in Digital Media. He was married in July and plans to attend law school upon graduation.

2nd prize in the essay contest was won by Michael Cohen, who will be a junior at Cornell University where he is majoring in Industrial and Labor Relations. His essay topic was: "The American Election: Let Freedom Ring".

3rd prize was won by Charlotte Schwarz, who will be a sophomore at Duke University. Her essay topic was: "Immigration and National Interests.

Both 2nd and 3rd place winners complete text will shortly be on our website. We can provide you hard copies of both upon request.