

Asheville-Citizens Times

Published July 23, 2009

Taking Personal Control of Health Care Reform

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A more hotly debated or contested issue than health care reform could hardly be found in America today. Almost everyone agrees that change of some kind needs to occur. Naysayers to the contrary, at least 47 million Americans, 13 million of whom are between the ages of 19 and 29, are without insurance for health care and those numbers are growing daily. Medical treatment is increasingly expensive and even those who are fortunate enough to have insurance find that deductibles and co-pays demand more out of pocket cash. Costs of medications are rising, denial of benefits is an ever present challenge and incentives for leading healthier lives are rarely to be found.

Thus, it is easy to see why the overwhelming desire of most Americans is for something to be done that will provide a simplified means of obtaining medical care and treatment that is affordable and based on the best and most current knowledge and practice.

The problem, then, is not in understanding the need for reform, it is in how to do it and at what cost. That seems to be where agreement disintegrates and misunderstanding of what can and ought to be done occurs. And that is where all sorts of special interest groups surface that threaten to derail what by rights should be an equitable system of health care for every citizen in the United States.

I maintain that there are sensible and productive steps that can be taken to begin to reform our system, improve the economic imbalance of health care and lead to better health for all. Those steps begin with us and they are directly related to where we work, what we eat, how active we are and what we believe about our own ability to control our health.

The impact of our personal life styles on the cost of medical care and the illnesses we suffer as a consequence are almost impossible to measure. The recent article in the Asheville Citizen-Times that reported at least 28% of the citizens in our state are obese points to one classic example. The burden of our excess weight demands that the health care system provide expensive and chronic care for problems and illnesses that are easily preventable. Reform truly begins, and the reduction of the cost of care becomes a reality, when we “eat smart and move more”, stop smoking, turn off the TV and head outdoors. There are plenty of opportunities to do so, beginning with our public parks, playgrounds, Y's, malls and community centers. One place surely that must be energized to do so is where we work. As individuals improve their health, productivity rises and health coverage costs go down. All employers would be well advised to look at ways to provide “work place wellness”, incentivize their employees to active participation and define their own niche in health care reform.

We all agree that we want a system of health care that is affordable, allows freedom to choose our source of care and promotes healthier living. If that is the case then all of us should take the first step and commit that, indeed, we will adopt a healthier life style in order to live a healthier life. That is, hopefully, the goal all should desire for health care, with or without reform.