

# Health Reform: Remember Why We Got Into This



**BY SR. CAROL KEEHAN, DC, R.N., M.S.**

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**M**edia reports of political charges and counter-charges about the potential impact of health reform can challenge the peace of mind of even the most stalwart. So it is no wonder the American public is conflicted. Just recently, Reuters polled more than 3,000 Americans, and 63 percent said they were willing to pay for health reform. However, only 35 percent felt the current efforts would lead to better service.

Predicting outcomes from structure changes is hard enough working with facts, but it becomes close to impossible in a polarized environment.

Now is the time to take a deep breath and remember why we got into this: the life and dignity of so many. Forty-six million Americans without insurance; more middle income families losing insurance every year; more paying a larger percent of their income for health care as wages are depressed and employers struggle to keep health insurance as a benefit. Millions finding their insurance inadequate just when they need it most. Personal bankruptcies due to medical bills at an all-time high. Providers with such large amounts of uncompensated care that they can no longer be cost-shifted to insured patients. Businesses that constantly claim they cannot compete with other industrialized nations whose spending on health care is 6 to 10 percent of their gross domestic product while ours is 16 percent and growing.

These were the right reasons to have gotten into this and they still are. As challenging and nerve-racking as this process is, the cost of failure is even more daunting. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation just published a report that looks at what the future will be like if we keep the status quo, and the projections are chilling.

Robert Wood Johnson reports that keeping the status quo will mean an increase in the uninsured between 2014 and 2019 from 53.1 million to 65.7 million. There will be a further decline in employer-sponsored insurance from 56 percent of people insured in 2009 to between 49 to 53 percent in 2019. They project huge increases in employer premiums for businesses of all sizes. Individual and family spending also shows huge increases, and the

cost of uncompensated care rises between 72 and 128 percent. This is an intolerable future for our nation. That is why we stay the course in the challenging debates over health reform legislation.

Restructuring is not for the faint of heart. Fortunately, as we sort through the voluminous pages of each bill, we have the CHA principles to guide us. Remember them:

1. Available and accessible to everyone from conception to natural death
2. Health and prevention oriented
3. Safe and of the greatest possible quality
4. Fairly financed
5. Transparent and consensus driven
6. Patient centered

These principles are invaluable as the key pieces of legislation are being debated and decided. CHA and its members are working closely with others, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Charities USA, as well as with other provider associations to sort out the issues. We are also working to ensure that the principles are reflected in legislative language. The work is tedious, but it is critical.

We are grateful for the positive response we have received from the White House and Congress on many important issues. You heard our president say to the Joint Session of Congress that there will be no federal funding of abortion and there will be conscience protection. We are now working to get legislative language written that reflects that.

Many of you have done outstanding work in your communities, in Congress and with the White House. Thank you so much; please stay with the process. This is the opportunity to get health care reform that protects the life and dignity of all the people of this country. ■



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