

# Ethical Perspectives

## On Health Care Reform

When the president signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law on March 23, 2010, it was a historic moment that followed decades of debate and thwarted initiatives for reforming U.S. health care.

One of the interesting and unfortunate realities of the debate was that health care reform never achieved the status of a moral issue. The arguments advanced for and against the legislation — not to mention the very need for health reform — were political, economic, social, psychological and ideological. Health reform as a moral issue that confronted our society as a whole, as well as every citizen, was eclipsed.

We cannot undo that reality. However, as we move forward with implementing the Affordable Care Act, we have the opportunity to consider its ethical dimensions and the implications of various provisions. We have undertaken an ongoing series of articles beginning in this issue to do just that.

Our first article, which follows, focuses on identifying and addressing myths associated with the health reform legislation. These are persistent myths that have consumed so

much attention and energy and led to such an undergrowth of misunderstanding that it is essential to clear away the brush.

In a second article in this issue, we address the what and the wherefore of the mandate for most people to buy health insurance or pay a tax penalty. We examine this individual mandate in the context of deeply rooted values in American culture and in the Judeo-Christian tradition that ground it ethically.

In later issues of *Health Progress* we will deal with the changing role of physicians, comparative effectiveness research, cost containment, health insurance and the insurance industry, and long-term care and end-of-life care.

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— Ron Hamel



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