

A "RIGHT" TO MEDICAL CARE?

In America today, many concepts essential for the preservation of freedom and a free society have been obscured and muddled. The concept of individual rights is the most basic and most muddled of these concepts. A warmed-over Medieval view of rights has been replacing the partially libertarian views of the last 150 years.

A prime example of the deterioration of the concept of rights, is the allegation that everyone has a right to medical care—a concept inherent in programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. At first glance a "right" to medical care may seem logical and desirable. However upon examination it will be clear that it contradicts the very concept of rights itself.

Implications of A "Right" to Medical Care

First realize that medical care must come from somewhere. Medical care does not exist as some sort of natural resource, but rather can only be provided by doctors and other health care professionals. There neither is nor can be any such thing as truly "free" medical care, medical care provided without human effort and cost. Given this obvious fact, what does a "right to medical care" really mean?

If you have a right to medical care it means that you have a right a doctor's services, which you can compel him to provide, regardless of whether you pay him, regardless of the doctor's wishes. Thus your "right" to medical care would imply a right to control a doctor's life and expropriate his skills to satisfy your needs. This means simply that doctors are slaves to the needs of society, and have no right to their own lives.

But if we hold that all human beings have the same rights, and that doctors have no rights, then rights can not exist for anyone, including you. And if rights do not exist, then you can have no "right" to medical care.

Thus if we start with the assumption that we have a right to medical care, we end up with the contradictory conclusion that rights do not exist—meaning that our original assumption was wrong.

A Right To A Livelihood?

The contradiction resulting from the assumption that we have a right to medical care comes from the general concept upon which that right is based . . . the concept of a "right to a livelihood". . . which is entirely different from and opposite to the concept of the right to life.

A "right to a livelihood" implies that people have a right to material services and objects simply because people exist and need things. This concept ignores the fact that before goods and services can be consumed, they must first be produced by someone's thought and effort. A "right to a livelihood" thus ignores the fact that such a "right" must necessarily violate all of the right of those who produce goods and services. The only way to avoid this problem is to assert that "some people are more equal than others," which means that a privileged social class (such as members of the Congress, the poor, members of the Communist Party, etc.) has the right to redistribute the wealth of everyone else, effectively enslaving them.

Logically there can be no such thing as a "right" to violate the rights of everyone else. To the extent that some men are allowed to redistribute the property of others, violence is institutionalized in society, the incentive for production is undermined, power is concentrated in the hands of the redistributors, a rift is created between the victims and beneficiaries of theft, and social peace and stability are undermined.

National Health Insurance and other compulsory public health schemes amount to nothing less than legalized theft, with taxpayers as the victims and welfarites, the indolent, the poor and the bureaucrats who administer the programs as the beneficiaries.

To be sure there are some poor persons in society who need and merit aide. But such needs can only be morally met through voluntary charity, not through compulsory public programs.

Further it is logically absurd to create mammoth new government bureaucracies to meet every real or imagined need of the poor. In the first place, programs like National Health Insurance would not simply aid the poor, who would constitute a tiny fraction of their participants. They would rather compel everyone in society to participate, whether they choose to or not. Further if one truly wishes to improve a poor person's welfare, it is far preferable to simply provide him with financial aid and let *him* decide what new goods or services would most benefit his life. To tell him he has a right to a certain amount of medical services, whether he needs them or not, is only to encourage unnecessary overuse of medical facilities.

The Fruits of "Free" Medical Care

National Health Insurance, Catastrophic Health Insurance and other proposed compulsory state and federal public medical care programs not only violate

the rights of Americans and place a new burden upon already beleaguered American taxpayers. In addition, such programs threaten the destruction of quality medical care in the United States itself.

To begin with, far from controlling medical costs, as proponents of these programs claim, National Health Insurance and other new major public health care programs would result in a tremendous increase in medical costs for a variety of reasons:

First, by breaking the link between the medical services a person consumed and what he had to pay for (when you go to a hospital under public health care, *everyone* pays for it), the incentive for individuals to limit their visits to the doctor and the hospital would be eliminated, resulting in a tremendous upsurge in demand for medical care, and attendant increased costs.

Second, the new federal bureaucracy created to administer any such program would greatly increase the real cost of health care since Americans would now have to pay to maintain the new bureaucracy; hospitals and doctors would have to fill out a whole new set of forms adding to their costs; and increased government control of medicine would eliminate competition and a lot of the incentive for health care professionals to reduce costs. Already under Medicaid and Medicare the predictable mentality has emerged "if the government's paying for it, let's charge as much as we can."

Government control over health care will also inevitably mean "cook-book" medicine in which individual needs and treatment are secondary to compliance with bureaucratic standards. Instead of meeting the needs of patients, doctors will rather be concerned with complying with the edicts of government.

Finally National Health Insurance will mean that doctor's offices and hospitals will be crowded with people who aren't really sick but who have minor ailments that they would (in the absence of "free" government medical care) take care of themselves. This is not conjecture but history. Under England's system of socialized medicine, over 700,000 people are now on hospital waiting lists and you can wait up to two years for corrective cataract surgery, even if you are legally blind.

Thus more public health care means more taxes, more bureaucracy, and more suffering.

Medicine, Liberty and Prosperity

One cannot reach a true conclusion from a false premise. Liberty and prosperity are inseparable.

Individual rights are neither an amusing fiction nor a dispensable luxury. The social recognition of individual rights is rather a necessary condition for the existence of any free and prosperous society.

Individual rights are based upon such fundamental facts of human nature as: • people are only productive when they have incentive to produce, • the confiscation and redistribution of wealth by government decreases the incentive to produce, • enslaved men are neither creative nor productive.

Government programs cannot, in the final analysis, increase human welfare because they only redistribute wealth rather than produce more wealth. The best way to improve the quality and lower the cost of health care in America is by reducing—not increasing—government control of health care. In particular the American Medical Association's near monopoly control of medical schools and physician licensing ought to be abolished, and drug efficacy requirements of the Food and Drug Administration (which drastically limit the introduction of new drugs into the United States while raising the cost of all drugs) ought to be abolished.

Because there is no right to medical care, because there is no such thing as free medical services, the only moral and practical way to insure quality health care in America is for government to leave doctors, and hospitals and you and me alone, and to allow medicine to develop in freedom.

The **Society for Individual Liberty** was the first national educational and activist organization dedicated to the principles of libertarianism. For more than ten years, S.I.L. has been promoting the goal of a free society in America through leadership, development of Libertarian clubs, dissemination of ideas, and encouragement of activist projects.

Your participation in S.I.L., through membership and through local activities, will help advance the future of the free society. Please show your support by joining S.I.L. today.

"From my observation, since its inception in 1969, the Society for Individual Liberty has been an important factor in introducing and disseminating libertarian ideas. It has helped to provide a cohesive link for libertarians."

Robert LeFevre

SIL DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

Adopted October 1969

As Advocates of Individual Liberty We Affirm:

That every person has an inalienable right to their own life, liberty and property;

That the only proper use of force is in retaliation against those who violate human rights;

That the basic violation of human rights consists of the initiation or the threat of the initiation of force against the individual;

That all proper social organization can only be a consequence of voluntary association between individuals;

That the only economic system consistent with human prosperity and happiness is laissez-faire capitalism;

That the ideologies and instrumentalities of coercive collectivism are the basic threat to human rights and the existence of moral human societies;

And that both moral individuals and moral societies have the obligation to act in their own rational self-interest to protect themselves from those who seek to coercively control, direct and enslave them.

With the apostles of coercion increasingly predominant in the councils of man, it is the duty of all those who value their life, liberty and property to take appropriate action—intellectual and social—to preserve and extend their freedom.

We as libertarians resolve to resist all forms of involuntary collectivism and all programs and activities of government which violate our rights and attempt to take from us the ability to set our own goals and to determine our own destiny.

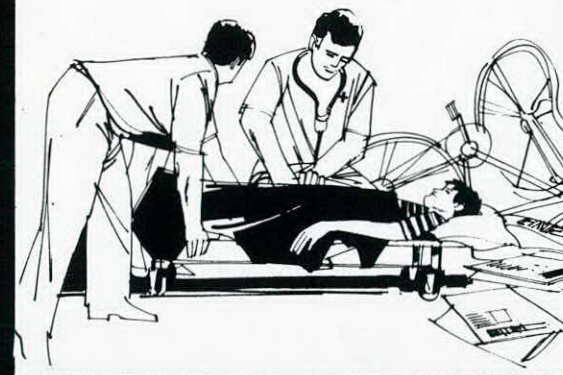
We work for the day when all individuals are free, and we look forward to a society of peace, plenty and freedom where the individual's rights are truly politically inalienable. As advocates of reason and liberty we seek and will settle for no less than:

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INDIVIDUAL
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