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Thoughts on Nationalized Healthcare

by Joanne Butler

With all the churning going on about President Obama's health care plan, I can't help but wonder if his plan had been in place in 2002, whether I would be alive today or not. Lest you think I'm being unduly dramatic, you should know that seven years ago I had a malignant polyp removed from my colon. What was unusual was that I was in my forties, and the 'best practices' indicate that a person's first colonoscopy occurs at age 50 — at the earliest.

Because my maternal grandfather died of colon cancer, my Mom drilled the warning signs into my brain long ago. When I started having problems, I did what the preventive care people say you should do, and called my doctor. When I told him about my grandfather, he said that I should have a colonoscopy right away. 'I know your health insurance doesn't cover colonoscopies at your age,' he said, 'but I will talk to them and get them to pay for it.'

He had that conversation, and shortly thereafter I had the procedure that saved my life.

Now imagine what would have happened if my doctor had to convince some federal medical panel to approve my colonoscopy. If we use the Social Security Disability Insurance system as a model, it would go like this:

Step 1: My doctor files a petition form with a low-level intake specialist/bureaucrat, whose job it is to keep the flow of petitions down. Not surprisingly, the intake specialist denies the request.

Step 2: My doctor files an appeal with another bureaucrat, who also says 'no.' Due to the huge volume of requests, intake specialists never meet with doctors; instead, they rely on an allowances manual to make their decisions. (Meanwhile, several months have gone by, and that polyp has gotten bigger.)

Step 3: I get out my checkbook and hire an appeals specialist, who prepares a more elaborate, legalistic appeal. I'm willing to spend the money because I need the colonoscopy, and if the federal medical board does not grant me a waiver to get a colonoscopy, it's illegal for me to get it privately. If I don't hire the appeals specialist, my case would be closed at step 2. As a last resort, I might consider going overseas (if I can afford it) for the procedure.

By step 3 a year — or two — has gone by, and the malignancy has grown and perhaps spread to other organs. By the time I get to the step that allows me to get a colonoscopy, would I be in hospice? That's not a bet I'm willing to take. Would you?

Make no mistake: any system of health care involves rationing — that includes the system that we have today, and any new system concocted in Washington. As I see it, President Obama would use a federal health practices board as one way to limit access to care. Diktats from the board will make doctors reluctant to prescribe procedures or medications for fear of being disciplined, struck off from participating in federally-approved plans, and losing income. Thus, the government will intrude in that most personal of conversations, those between a doctor and his/her patient.

Am I worried for the future? Indeed I am.

Although I've been cancer-free since 2002, last week my Mom's sister had a malignant mass removed from her colon. (She's doing fine.) I'd like to think that over the next 30 years or so, I'll have access to cancer surgery if my doctor and I think I need it — without begging a bureaucrat for permission.

Does Senator Carper realize what's at stake? A member of one of the two Senate committees that's drafting the legislation, he's a key player in the negotiations. Unfortunately, Carper has said that Obama's so-called 'public option' (a government health plan that would compete with private plans) is OK as a fallback plan.

I guess our Senator has forgotten that last August, Candidate Obama supported a gradual introduction of 'single payer' -- a totally government-run healthcare system. Let's help Senator Carper connect the dots: Obama's 'public option' is the gateway to single payer, and a total socialization of our health care.

What sort of America will we have if we have to literally beg the central government for our very lives? The basic concept of America (where, as the Declaration of Independence tells us, power flows from the people to the government) will be overturned and we will become vassals of the state. This is reason enough to oppose President Obama's brave new medical world.

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