

YOUR RESOUNDING RESPONSE TO MY QUESTIONNAIRE REGARDING THE HEALTHCARE CONUNDRUM

By Dr. Victor M. Sternberg

September 4, 2017

The questions I posed to my patient population and your fellow citizens were answered with resounding and meaningful opinions and comments.

It is important to hear from the people who make up our community instead of having to endure the constant diatribe of the political class and the pundits on the radio and TV.

I'm just going to run through some of the highlights of the many responses I received.

- An interesting comment about one-payer system indicating that currently the Medicare, Medicaid and VA benefits cost all of us through our taxes nearly 50% of all the healthcare costs. When Medicare was first proposed and begun, life expectancy was nearly 20 years less than it is today. Medication that exists today was not yet on the market and 10 workers were working for each person covered. All metrics have changed but we have not. We have a single-payer system for half of the population of this country when you add up all of those who are in Medicaid, Medicare and the VA.
- Commented that the Republicans are concerned about the national debt and rightly so while the Democrats are more concerned about healthcare for everyone. We have a crazy tax code. Both parties are aware that infrastructure is failing. We need serious people in our Congress to resolve these problems.
- Why hasn't the IRS audit staff quadrupled? I'm sure there is enough tax revenue that's uncollected that would pay for healthcare for all.
- Wanted to know why Medicare cannot negotiate the price of drugs where every other organization can and every other nation can.
- Wondered why costs for hospital services are opaque so we cannot see what we are paying for.
- Coming from a poor home, only option was to use clinics. Do clinics still exist?
- Everyone should receive basic healthcare but it should not be with an open checkbook.
- A poor person with terrible dental problems should be entitled to have dentures but not implants. We're equal in many respects but not in every respect.
- Felt that healthcare should be available to all. A healthy populace is more likely to be productive and educated.
- Felt that healthcare should be more affordable.
- People don't always bring their children to doctors because of the copay and high deductibles.
- We should collectively be ready to pay more taxes and should be willing to do so.
- Would Social Security pass today?

- I am intrigued by the Canadian system. Canadians have come here because of long waits. Does that endanger the outcome of their health? If we do have a Canadian-type of system, all doctors should be required to participate.
- Felt he was more concerned about the quality of his life than longevity. Healthcare should be based on individual priority.
- Canada is a beautiful country but you better get ready to get in line for treatment.
- Felt that the problem with human nature is if you start giving away something for free, then people take it for granted within a year or two and believe that it is an entitlement.
- Questions why insurance companies which are for-profit entities should be allowed to make so much money for their executives who are among the highest paid in the healthcare industry. They are siphoning off money that could go to reduce drug costs.
- It's not uncommon for Medicaid patients to take a taxi to the hospital for every little emergency and then have a cab waiting with the bill paid for by us.
- Youngsters getting \$150 sneakers and iPhones and claiming poverty.
- Canadian doctors: questions whether they pay exorbitant malpractice rates like American doctors do. How long you have to wait for an MRI.
- Would be willing to pay more taxes but felt that we should tax churches and other religious institutions in a way that would not interfere with their parishioners; tax anything that is above and beyond what is needed to provide religious services.
- Believes the whole system is broken and we spend too much time talking about who pays for it and not enough time fixing the fundamentals of the system.
- Believes the system should be based more on a free-market system in which people know what the costs are so they can make better decisions. Also thinks that basic insurance should be provided by the government for everyone. Also thinks that people should owe a copayment for treatments. If they don't owe a copayment, they perceive very little value for the treatment they receive and get less out of it.
- Felt that if he didn't have health insurance, particularly Medicare, he would have gone bankrupt since he suffered a serious illness.
- Felt that we should pay increased taxes for healthcare. It only works when everyone participates. The whole idea is that the lucky pay for the unlucky.

As you can see, we have many opinions and many different views of a complicated issue.

What is clear though is that from the comments I received, there is much more thought and much more possibility of dialogue than the knee-jerk reactions that we hear from our Congressmen, Senators, the Executive Branch and unfortunately the media.

Let us continue the dialogue.

Yours truly,
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