

Something to really make you 'sicko'

The United States health care system is closer to perfect than any system in the world. Rather than announcing that our current system should copy the inferior systems available in socialist countries, as Michael Moore proclaims in his latest film "Sicko," the American health care system must focus on its strength – high quality health care – and work to resolve its problems, particularly preventive care and expanded access.

We regularly work with health care systems, physician practices and other providers to offer legal and strategic consulting. While we welcome the open discussion of our health care system that movie is generating, many of his conclusions ignore true facts associated with health care in the United States.

Our current system is not health care – it's sick care. But Mr. Moore's use of personal tragedies to bring attention to health care issues ignores the undeniable truth that our system offers the best care in the world.

Access to quality health care here is better than Cuba, or anywhere else in the world. Federal law requires all individuals be provided emergency care regardless of ability to pay. The level of care received in the emergency room is the highest level of care available anywhere.

To improve our system further, we must promote preventive care. Through our current lifestyle choices we over-indulge in alcohol, fatty foods and other unhealthy habits. To deal with our ill health, the government has structured a system of health care insurance by which only coverage for the sick is widely available.

Does it make any sense that preventive care or prenatal visits aren't covered or promoted by many health care plans and that we provide very little, if any preventive care for the uninsured? Of course not.

Policies and decisions made by insurance

GUEST OPINION
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companies can hinder hospitals, practices and other health care providers and prevent them from delivering what they were trained to perform – high-quality patient care. But increased government oversight will exacerbate the problem, not provide the solution. Patients, physicians, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, foundations and everyone involved in health care must take responsibility for the elements of the system over which they have direct control and responsibility. Health care providers are providing excellent care – other essential players in health care aren't taking responsibility for their health.

Starbucks is one corporate success story. Starbucks charges three dollars for what should be a 75-cent cup of coffee. That profit is used in part to fund the cost of health care for thousands of employees. Starbucks is committed to ensuring its employees have health insurance. Starbucks is a perfect example of an entity taking responsibility for its role in the health care of workers.

However, what if we take the United States health care model and impose it on a company like Starbucks? We tell them, as we dictate to our hospitals and physicians, that one out of five customers aren't going to pay for their coffee, but your company must provide it for free.

No one would think that was a fair or reasonable approach. We do, however, demand that health care providers cover emergency

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services for free. This is an irresponsible approach to a problem that affects everyone and needs to be solved by everyone, not just one segment of the system.

Mr. Moore's misuse of examples from Britain, Canada, Cuba and France regarding universal or socialized medicine wrongly suggests that those systems guarantee unlimited care for all, which is untrue. Socialized medicine demands the allocation of limited resources – a patient gets what

the government says the patient needs, not what the patient wants or is willing to pay for. Americans do not want to be told when they can see a doctor or what treatment they need.

While we commend Michael Moore for asking us to take a hard look at the current health care system, let's approach the problem with open eyes, asking everyone involved to be a part of the solution. Further, let's congratulate our health care providers for providing the best care in the world.

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