

Good morning, and thank you for putting this forum together.

My name is Judy Sheridan-González. I've been an ER nurse for 35 years at Montefiore, and I'm the president of the NYS Nurses Association. I speak on behalf of our 42,000 members and the millions of patients we take care of every day.

This issue is a test as to who we are as a people.

The Declaration of Independence asserts that we, the people are "...endowed...with certain unalienable rights...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and "...that to secure these rights, governments are instituted..."
The right to health is imbedded in that statement and the role of government is to secure that right. We have yet to honor that commitment.

We need *more* forums, *more* gatherings, *more* rallies, *more* testimonies; we need to march in the streets; we need to shout it from the rooftops: the time is here, the time is now for a total revamping of our health care system.

Why?

Because it's not working!

Because we, as health providers, have sworn an oath to "do no harm."

And this system, in spite of our heroics, is doing harm.

How do we know this? Nurses are front line caregivers! AND we are patients. We see the Great American Rip-Off: insurance-based health care. We know what it is, what it does, who it hurts and who it benefits.

An Institute of Medicine report more than a decade ago stated that there were over 400,000 reported deaths per year, caused by errors within our health care facilities, and that negative outcomes as a result of practices in our health care system are likely 10x that many!

Sadly, the current system is designed to compromise care rather than provide it. The caregivers that treat you want the best for you—but our hands are frequently tied. Your treatment options often depend upon their level of profitability (or potential loss) for the providing agency, or the insurer.

Nurses and doctors have to work *around* the system to get you what you need. Time that could be spent *with* you is now spent outsmarting insurance or drug policies, bypassing electronic medical system (EMR) obstacles, or engaging in detailed documentation for agencies, regulations and billing departments.

Ironically, people say, "But I have good insurance. I don't want to take a chance at losing it." Really? You love your premiums? Or is it the deductible you're excited about...how bout the co-insurance, the co-pays. Or when you find out a life saving treatment isn't covered; or a therapy can't be accessed unless you go through a year of some "preferred" torturous treatment first.

Or you have to wait till the next SEASON for an appointment with a specialist. Or your doctor has joined another plan-Bye bye... just when you found someone you can trust...

So why is the health care system in the United States today a scam? Think: every other industrialized nation has a national health plan that covers everyone. They spend far less (in many cases half) than we do and *their health indices are better in nearly every single category.*

So what are people afraid of? Why aren't they sounding the alarm: our system is harmful, we need an overhaul, not a touch-up. Neither the masses of patients nor the masses of health care workers are benefitting from the current system. That's a problem!

Obviously, some of us are lucky: we have the right diagnosis at the right time in the right place with the right provider and the right insurance and the right social connections or skills and voila! We have a successful health care experience.

But if any of those ingredients are missing from the chain, well, that's another story. Your labs got lost, you were sent to the wrong clinic, they gave you the wrong date, they forgot to tell you to come back for a second opinion, the pharmacy never got your prescription, or, maybe, just maybe, you don't even know you got shafted. And here, I'm talking about the people with *good* insurance, the so-called winners.

The only place you're guaranteed care when you need it, is in our Emergency Rooms—they can't turn you away. But of course we know that our ERs are chronically overwhelmed, overcrowded, lack privacy (till it's scary) and serve as petri dishes for cross infections. In the Bronx, and in similar underserved communities, the situation is magnified ten-fold.

We really have to ask ourselves, why *is* there opposition to such an obvious solution (or beginning of a solution) to our health care crisis?

There's a psychological term for it: *projection*. Insurance companies and hospitals (and others who directly benefit from the chaos) engage in this grand deception by projecting their own inadequacies onto the rest of us.

Projection is a psychological defense mechanism in which we attribute characteristics we find unacceptable in ourselves onto others. This is precisely what these Insurance Predators and Mega-hospital Empires are doing. We're told Medicare for All will cost more—wrong, we're paying more now, for less. We're told it will result in long waits (all I hear when patients come to the ER is, "They didn't have any appointments until January.") We're told we won't get the drugs we need (happening now, more than you think). We're told we won't get to keep our doctor. Already happening----and by the way, these things *don't simply* happen with medicare for all.

What happens is: folks don't go bankrupt, they don't die b/c they can't afford to go to the hospital, they don't delay treatment and then find they have metastatic Cancer, their teenagers don't overdose b/c insurance only covers 20 mental health visits, they don't stroke out b/c they can't afford their blood pressure meds, they don't die in childbirth b/c they couldn't access prenatal care, and that very long list, my friends, goes on. **I say this b/c I see it, we see it, we experience it and that's why we say there *is* no alternative, only a worsening system that is cascading into an abyss or the change we need to muster up the courage to adopt.**

Now, we hear that “Labor” is a problem. This is not simple but I guarantee that an untarnished bill—b/c bills change my friends, they get dissected and altered, and I think that’s where the fear comes in--will be superior to any plan anyone currently has.

We can’t have an incremental bill—Obamacare showed us that while it insured a few more, it didn’t fundamentally alter the way we do health care—and things have gotten worse. Private insurance simply has to go. It’s the albatross hanging on the neck of the public.

Whatever rough edges exist in this bill, I am confident that Labor can work to fix them. And while, ideally, we need a national plan, realistically we have to start somewhere—and that somewhere is here and now.

All we need is the will to do it. There’s already a way to do it.

Thank you.

Submitted by
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