

November 28, 2007

**Health Care in America  
The Horror and the Hope**

By HELEN REDMOND

First the horror, lest any believe there is not a massive and continuous health care catastrophe in this country that kills and forces people to live lives full of preventable pain and disfigurement.

A short article with haunting photos in the New York Times by Sara Corbett titled "Patients Without Borders" spoke heartbreaking volumes about the state of health care in the rural areas of the United States of A lot of uninsured. Yes, hundreds of thousand of people still live far outside urban centers and if you think health care is hard to obtain and the wait is long in major cities full of hospitals and clinics, try getting medical care in small towns. Managed care/competition - the Clintons answer to the health care crisis in the 90's - never made it to small-town America.

Most summers the residents of Wise County, Virginia are visited by volunteer doctors who work for an organization called Remote Area Medical (RAM). The organization also provides free medical services to poor countries with little to no health care infrastructure like Haiti and Guyana South America. Wise County has much in common with the aforementioned countries. When the fairgrounds opened at 5:30 am of the first day 800 people were standing in line. By midmorning 1,200 were waiting. Over 3 days 2,500 were seen but hundreds had to be turned away. An array of medical personnel went to work to provide basic health care to the poor and uninsured. And 78 dentists extracted more than 3,700 teeth. One patient had 12 teeth pulled out. A doctor quoted in Corbett's article said "If you spend a day here you see there's something wrong with health care in this country." Something is indeed wrong, criminal even. Here's another number: rationed care is responsible for nearly 100,000 deaths every year.

I want every presidential candidate both Republican and Democrat, every politician who voted against SCHIP, every person in power who doesn't believe that health care is a human right, or is against single-payer, to stand in line in the rain for hours to see a doctor. To receive health

care only once a year in a fairground that must be bleached clean of horse manure before health care providers can work, to register in a barn, to be examined and treated in an animal stall - feet sinking into wet hay and mud - or in a musty old, threadbare tent that offers no privacy. To have 12 rotting teeth pulled out in one day! And then goddammit tell me the private, for-profit health care system works.

Now the hope. At the Midway Airport Marriott Hotel in Chicago on November 10th and 11th, a highly motivated and committed collection of people from all walks of life, and all ages gathered for a national conference organized by Marilyn Clement and sponsored by the organization Healthcare-NOW! Leading members from the National Nurses Organizing Committee (NNOC), the California Nurses Association (CNA), Physicians for a National Health Plan (PNHP), the labor unions IBEW, UE, UAW, and dozens of lesser known but just as important grassroots organizations from 30 states were represented. Donna Smith, whose story was featured in Michael Moore's Sicko, Congressman John Conyers from Michigan (he has sponsored federal single-payer legislation, HR 676), and Mary Flowers an Illinois State Representative (her single-payer bill is HB 311), also attended.

Two ideas/themes were central to the conference: health care is a human right, and an uncompromising pledge to fight for single-payer (no support for useless, incremental reforms.) And the fight has already begun. The opening session was a series of reports on actions across the country and the effects of the crisis. The range of activities, the depth of understanding of the issue, the creativity, was astonishing. A member of the Women's Economic Agenda Project in California talked about health care as a social justice issue and the planning of "Truth Commissions" where people tell their health care horror stories. In Florida members of the Alachua County Labor Party held a meeting and invited politicians to come and listen - they weren't allowed to speak. The Chicago Single-Payer Action Network held a protest in front of the Blue Cross insurance building. A family from Dallas, Texas, inspired by Sicko, formed a single-payer organization called Protest Now. The Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Single-Payer printed fake 500,000 bills with Congressman Jim Smith's face in the middle that asked Who Does He Work For Anyway? Like many politicians Mr. Smith accepts

generous campaign contributions from health care corporations.

Throughout the weekend the anger, outrage, and commitment to fight was palpable. Strong words like vilify, call-out, throw-out, expose, bird-dog, defeat, and shame were widely used.

We made ambitious plans for the upcoming year. We are organizing a national day of action against the health insurance industry. We are going to show a powerful, new DVD that explains HR 676 - the national single-payer bill - to groups all around the country. We are traveling to Boston, Massachusetts to expose the fraud and failure of the individual mandate approach to health care. Watch out Mitt Romney, there is going to be another Boston Tea Party but this time instead of tea, your effigy is going into the harbor!

Hallelujah! A new civil rights movement has been born and our eyes are on the prize. We are going to end the horror of the for-profit health care system and put the humanity back in.

Join us!

For more information on meetings and actions contact:

[www.healthcare-now.org](http://www.healthcare-now.org)  
[www.guaranteedhealthcare.org](http://www.guaranteedhealthcare.org)  
[www.pnhp.org](http://www.pnhp.org)  
[www.chispan.org](http://www.chispan.org)  
[www.justhealthcare.org](http://www.justhealthcare.org)

To get a free copy of the DVD email Healthcare-NOW! or call 1 800 453 1350.

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