

Nutrition – A Single Payer System?

Over a decade ago, I wrote a *satire* advocating a national single payer system for nutrition. I incorporate a summary in my book, "De-Spamming Health – Reforming the Health System from the Bottom Up". The intent was to stimulate a cogent and comprehensive discussion of the pros and cons of a single payer approach for a system construct *outside the health system per se*. In my book, I also frequently refer to the analogy of a supermarket for the same reason. When individuals are too close to a subject they often have difficulty calmly and collectively focusing upon the "big picture" and, instead, emotionally engage in pontification and spin about certain system fragments they champion.

Several recent news stories have reported the pros and cons of the current recession upon nutrition, a major contributing factor to health status. The bad news is that some folks claim they are unable to afford healthy foods, along with preventive health care and gym memberships, resulting in an adverse effect upon their family's health. The good news is that, allegedly, folks are eating out less and that, in general, home-cooked foods are healthier. President Obama's choice to head the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Thomas Frieden, is a leading advocate of the use of government regulation, e.g., trans- fats, secondhand smoke, to promote healthy lifestyle practices. Therefore, perhaps it is time to re-advocate for expansion of government nutritional programs, including a national single payer system.

Below, I only touch upon a few of the *advantages* of such an approach. First, depending upon family size and composition - and in exchange for the fair payment of taxes - , the government would assure *every* family financial access (vouchers or food card) to purchase essential foods for proper nutrition. It would define proper nutrition and the preparation skills and equipment required by each family, educating and subsidizing those without such. It would expand comparative-effectiveness research to define those food items most effective in meeting each family's nutritional needs and items eligible for voucher use. By collecting each family's money for nutrition upfront in taxes, the government could help assure that the uneducated and irresponsible now cook nutritious home meals from raw foods, rather than succumb to the convenience and attraction of prepared, processed and fast foods. (In my book, I also discuss the cons, as well as nutritional counseling, special needs, school lunches, gardening, hunting, eating out, cultural and ethnic preferences and restrictions, etc. as they affect the plan.).

The single payer system should greatly reduce the cost of nutrition. Government vouchers would encourage the purchase of cheap, basic, bulk, "nutritionally equivalent" generic food items rather than highly advertised brand name, processed and fast foods that manufacturers often encourage retail grocers and restaurant owners to promote, allegedly in exchange for free samples, pens, and vacation seminars. Not only would families be less likely to consume these - contributing to improved health status - but also the nation would save the money and energy intrinsic in producing these products, as would the supermarkets in stocking them. The size, stocking costs, spoilage loss, energy demand, administrative processing