

Equitable access to quality health care based on need

By: Laura A. Russell

Everyone has heard the debate on health care. Some say the Affordable Care Act was a miracle. Others say it hurt them financially. Some ask for Medicare for all. Others say it would overburden the system. The debate continues. Unfortunately as it continues, people continue to get sick, and even die.

The United States lags behind most developed nations in providing health care. The U.S. life expectancies have dropped for the last two years in a row, with the life expectancy of women regressing at a faster pace. The U.S. child mortality rates are the worst among the top twenty wealthiest countries. The United States is worse for maternal health than we were twenty-five years ago, with 50,000 preventable deaths or near-deaths occurring annually. The U.S. has seen a 70% increase in maternal mortality in the past twenty years.

And these facts, many of which show the regression of health care, are only compounded when you add poverty and race to the mix. Poverty tends to yield higher burdens on women and girls' health. And race, also exacerbates the problems. African-American women are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than Caucasian women. Even education does not equalize these results. African-American women with advanced degrees are more likely to lose their baby than Caucasian women with less than an eighth grade education.

These are just a few facts about the current system of health care. The reality is that the United States has a poor system for the distribution of health care.

Health Care is a Right

Health care is, in fact, a human right. Everyone in the bottom 90% of wealth are fundamentally undermined if they cannot function effectively, which includes working, because of lack of access to health care. It is inhumane to deny health care to individuals, and it is economically and social destructive. By denying health care, one cannot work, cannot care for a family and cannot support themselves. That creates for a person, who was middle class, an income at or below the poverty guideline. Without health care, you are simply pushing more people into poverty.

Health Care needs to be equitable based on need, not gender or race

Race and gender discrimination exist in health care. For example, women of color with cervical cancer—a disease that can be easily prevented and cured—have a lower survival rate than Caucasian women, due to later diagnosis and treatment differences. The US has the highest maternal mortality ration among wealthy countries. In one city, the rate for women of color to die in childbirth was 12 times higher than that for Caucasian women.

Through equitable access to health care, possibly by a single payer system, we could eliminate the discrepancies in health care for gender and race. The amount health care providers would be paid would be equal, thus creating a single tiered payment plan. Currently, health care insurers pay for items at varying rates, and some pay more for certain items. This creates an inequity in the system. A single payer option would create one system for all. At single-payer's core is the age-old principle of basic human equality, translated to the arena of health. "Health care is a basic human right,"

Health Care needs to be available everywhere

Health care costs are often notably higher in rural communities. There are many reasons for this, included lack of market competition and lack of providers. Colorado, for example, has documented a nearly 36% differential in the annual cost of services for individuals in its "mountain communities" versus in the rating area including Boulder, its lowest-cost region.

When health care costs are high, everyone suffers. People pay more for insurance, and very often, go without. Rural communities, in general, have higher rates of poverty, so insurance is unaffordable. Without patients, health care providers go elsewhere. This leaves a community with no doctor, no hospital and no hope.

If insurance was a basic human right, we would all be entitled. And it could cost the same regardless of region. Therefore, patients would have insurance and the ability to see a doctor. More health care providers would stay and there would be equality and availability for all, not just for the people in a densely populated area.

Health Care should be based on need

Americans often do not get the care they need even though the United States spends more money per person on health care than any other nation in the world. Preventive care is underutilized, resulting in higher spending on complex, advanced diseases. Some patients will be over-served because of incomes or insurance. Health care is based on ability to pay for procedures, not need.

As a basic human right, health care should be based on need. The need for universal and equitable access to good quality health care that allows for equal utilization for those with equal need is a must. Without it, those who can pay will supersede those who need medical help.

Health Care should not be based on gender

As the recent Supreme Court Decision, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* makes clear, health care is gendered. People who can become pregnant have their bodies regulated more than those who cannot become pregnant. Women are denied basic human rights of health care, and they are denied their own autonomy. Their health become pawns in a political system. All genders need access to the same health care and health services. No gender should be forced or denied access to medical procedures based on others' beliefs.

What does The Episcopal Church say?

Since 2009, The Episcopal Church has advocated for basic healthcare to all (Resolutions 2009-C071, 2009-D048, 2009-D088). The Church has advocated that we have a universal health care system, which would be able to insure everyone who needed insurance. Even recently, in 2015 and 2018, The Episcopal Church reaffirmed its belief in Medicaid and Medicare, and advocated for equal access to health care regardless of gender (Resolutions 2015-A092, 2018-D032) .