Right to reform

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Abstract
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Right to reform

I am often asked what is the single most important issue that needs to be resolved in order to insure that health care reform moves forward in America. The answer is actually quite simple: If the key reason to reform the health care system is to extend health insurance coverage to the tens of millions of Americans who have none, then all those promoting reform must drive home the ethical position that health care is a right.

As the current debate over health reform shows, those who oppose change argue that health reform cannot work because reform is not practical due to “the details.” A larger load of baloney masquerading as an argument is hard to imagine.

Health care is not in the details. Think I am wrong? How far did we get this summer wallowing around in claims about co-ops, public plans, death panels, rationing, and cost savings? Health reform is in the ethics. America is not likely to buy any of these arguments. But there is a foundation for rights that every American understands—equality of opportunity. Our nation loves the free market. But you cannot compete in the free market unless you can see, hear, move, chew, think, communicate, and breathe. Health care is essential to being able to do these things. We must make sure that each one of us has minimal health care coverage so every one can compete and flourish in a free society.

In some societies, health care is seen as a right because it has been earned. The British National Health Service was created in response to the British public having endured the Nazi blitz for many awful years. Some societies see health care as a right because a healthy workforce means a stronger economy. That was the basis for health care reform in Germany and Singapore. And in some nations, health care is seen as a right because of the ethical belief that a community should look after its own. Switzerland, Canada, Australia, France, Taiwan, New Zealand, and many other nations have grounded their right to health care in this idea of social solidarity.

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The physician’s voice

Health reform is not in the details. Think I am wrong? How far did we get this summer wallowing around in claims about co-ops, public plans, death panels, rationing, and cost savings? Health reform is in the ethics. No nation on earth has ever reformed its health care system by asking the public to wallow around in the details of health reform. Canada, Britain, France, Spain, Singapore, Taiwan, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and the rest of the list of our economic peer nations that have universal health care coverage did not assemble their finest numbers crunchers and pencil pushers and send them into the front lines of the battle to sell reform. Each nation secured agreement that health care is a right and then and only then moved on to figure out how to guarantee that right to all citizens.

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References

