Improved Access to Care
Healthcare's Remedy

Since earning the title of doctor, I have too often witnessed the failings of our current health care "system". My first job after residency was as a hospitalist. After admitting a patient with a hypertensive emergency, I controlled her blood pressure and transitioned her to oral medications. She was discharged home with several prescriptions. Two days later, she was back in the ER with the same problem. I entered her room feeling irritated and asked why she had not followed instructions. She answered simply that she could not afford the medications. Luckily, I was working in a county with a sales tax funded health plan for uninsured residents. She was signed up and back on her medications. She was not seen again in the ER. Upon arrival in Ohio, I grew blissfully ignorant of these problems. I worked as a civilian at a military clinic. I sometimes worried if my patients would be compliant, but I never had to worry that cost was an issue. As my job changed again, I entered practice in the community. I began hearing stories from people suffering from lack of health insurance and underinsurance. I met a self-employed maid who went for years without her synthroid because she could not afford to pay for office visits, lab work, and medication. I met an insured social worker who took his esomeprazole every other day. He was unaware that an equally effective medication was available for a much smaller copayment. I met a young woman with bipolar disorder who had received treatment in a homeless shelter clinic. She found a job and an apartment, but when her medication ran out, she was told she no longer qualified for care because she was not homeless.

As physicians, we can no longer allow the business of medicine to take care of itself. Insurance, pharmaceutical, and pharmacy benefit management companies all profit at patient, provider, and government expense. They benefit by raising barriers, denying benefits, and expanding bureaucracy. It is time for a remedy. Primary care physicians are uniquely positioned to shape a new health care delivery system that can balance patient needs and cost effectiveness. It is immoral to allow the mistreatment of the inadequately insured to continue. This is why I want to advocate for universal coverage.

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