



Injured: Analyzing the Healthcare System of the United States

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Canada 1946, the Globe and Mail newspaper, reported how “a woman in labor was refused help by three successive physicians, apparently because of her inability to pay” (Gawande). Australia 1954, in the Sydney Morning Herald, a letter was published seeking for help of a woman with lung disease. “She couldn’t afford to refill her oxygen tank, and had been forced to ration her intake to a point where she is on the borderline of death” (Gawande). Britain, at a hospital in London where George Bernard Shaw was visiting an eminent physician and the assistant reported “ a sick man had arrived requesting treatment” the physician asked “is he worth it?”(Gawande). Health care reform, like many reforms that have occurred throughout history, started with stories of cruelty.

These are some of the many horrible stories that have been told about people receiving bad health care during the 20th century. Luckily many countries, like Australia, England and Canada, realized that there was a problem, and made a change in their healthcare systems, but the United States didn’t. These horrible stories weren’t enough to change their minds about healthcare, what had some negative long-term consequences. Today, the United States is one of the only countries where health care reform is occurring. Still, this reform is facing many resistance because of Americans fear of change.

It is said that the universal healthcare is better than private, and is reflected for example in how France was rated as the best healthcare system by the W.H.O (World Health Organization) “because of its universal coverage, responsive health care providers, patient and provider freedoms, and the health and longevity of the country’s population while the United States was rated as 37th” (Hunnicut,153). But is not like France is much better than other countries that have universal , After all, these countries share many characteristics such as: “a more efficient and cheaper service that covers everyone” (Hunnicut, 123), which led Europe to have the best health care system in the world. This should lead to think why wouldn't the States change to universal if it's better? The answer is their main problem, the answer is that the United States is afraid of this change.

Truly now, depending on the country there are two different ways of offering health care, private and universal. Private healthcare is a system in which you pay what you consume. This health care is provided by nongovernmental entities, and for example in the United States you have both employment-base care, that is the health insurance provided to employers so that the financial cost and risk are distributed among them; and the individual plans, that is the health insurance that mostly people who doesn't get access to employment-base care gets. The main problem of this plan is that because the financial risk relies only on one person or a family, the risk is way bigger and it tends to be more expensive.

However, there is some health insurance sponsored by the government in the United States right now, what makes it's system somewhat of an hybrid between private and universal healthcare. The biggest sponsored health insurance is Medicare, which covers people older than 65 years old and people with permanent illnesses; and Medicaid, which cover people and families with low incomes and that meet certain requirements as being a legal citizen of the United States.

In the other hand, in universal healthcare you as individual pay taxes based on the money you make for your health care insurance, and whenever you use the health service you don't really pay for it because you are paying monthly for it. What is after all the same idea of the employment-base care but for the whole country.

It is said that universal healthcare system is better, but is not necessarily because it's more expensive, for example, “ France pays \$3500 per capita while the States pays \$6100 per person” (Hunnicut, 153). This directly prove wrong the point of United States, who has tend to see universal healthcare as a more expensive option when it's not. It's strange, strange and controversial, because being the States one of the only highly developed countries in the world who uses private healthcare which main problem is to be really expensive, won't change to universal because they believe it's more expensive when it's not. Is it then just a bad excuse to try to hide they fear of change?

However, cost alone is not the only factor preventing a shift towards universal healthcare. In order to

fully understand why Universal triumphed in other countries and not the United States despite its strengths, we must first explore the history behind this debate. Now, the question is, why and how did the United States get to this situation of been the only country where universal healthcare didn't triumph? This situation started around 60-70 years ago, when a lot of deals were going on, including in healthcare, where “the profession of medicine become the business of medicine”(Armstrong et. al. Preface XI), and that is somewhat true.

During the 1940s when many countries changed to universal health care they had a reason. In contrast to today's debate, the reason for this shift wasn't really money. In the 1940's the price of health care just started to rise, there wasn't that much of the expensive technology, knowledge or medications found today that make healthcare as expensive as it is now. But, there was a bigger and more important reason forcing the change to universal healthcare, humans. In these times you could hear from horrific traits that people were receiving since medicine become as business, and that was a real problem, some people wasn't getting the health care they deserved or needed, and the Second World War was going on, so specially in this times there were many people who needed health services that they didn't receive. And we as a human race realized of our mistake and decided, “Healthcare is a fundamental human right that should be available to all people regardless of their economic resource(s)” (Hunnicut, 100). So most countries, starting with Europe in general, decided to make health a priority and changed the system. From that point on, the government controlled hospitals and other health care services, and they made each family pay a certain monthly amount depending on their incomes, and then providing open healthcare for everyone, meaning that if you needed it you just went to a hospital and got service. This was an ideological boom in which people believe that: “care should be based on need, not money, on diagnosis rather than ability to pay. In general people do not get ill by choice, nor do they choose their illnesses”(Armstrong, 54).

But there was something going on in other side of the pacific ocean, the United States never changed, it is hard to explain the way this idea of universal coverage didn't affect the United States.

Back in time, when prices in medicine and treatment increased business started hiring people and providing healthcare to the employer. So all this people were working in business and receiving healthcare so they were doing pretty well, but the problem was that there was people unemployed or self employed had to take some risk, as maybe go with no health care or paid full amount for everything for each use of the health care. This, is was we can identify as the root or of the problem, because if you think about it, the problem is that people have to take risk to go with no health care, or just take a huge economic effort and risk for paying it, and that a big amount of the population of the United States today. So if this was the problem since 60 years ago, why haven't the United States changed solve the problem yet?

“Three years ago, I proposed a major health insurance program to the Congress, seeking to guarantee adequate financing of health care on a nationwide basis. That proposal generated widespread discussion and useful debate. But no legislation reached my desk”(Nixon's Plan For Health Reform) Nixon said. During his presidency, Nixon presented a health care plan to the Secretary of health, education and welfare and then the Congress basing in 7 principles:

First, it offers every American an opportunity to obtain a balanced, comprehensive range of health insurance benefits. Second, it will cost no American more than he can afford to pay. Third, it builds on the strength and diversity of our existing public and private systems of health financing and harmonizes them into an overall system. Fourth, it uses public funds only where needed and requires no new Federal taxes. Fifth, it would maintain freedom of choice by patients and ensure that doctors work for their patient, not for the Federal Government. Sixth, it encourages more effective use of our health care resources .And finally, it is organized so that all parties would have a direct stake in making the system work: consumer, provider, insurer, State governments and the Federal Government (*Nixon's Plan For Health Reform*).

Even though Nixon presented this reform for a new healthcare system, it never went through, which is sad. It's sad because Nixon make an effort to improve the country, but the country rejected the help, it's sad because the United States rejected progress, they rejected something better, a healthcare system more like the nowadays universal healthcare system, which seem to be the more efficient one.

But it's not like universal healthcare is perfect, it also have problems, like overuse. It is like giving "free access to food, too many people would take too much food, leaving many others with no food at all." (Hunnicut, 94). It also has other problems such as excessive wait times for diagnostic test, doctor appointments, and surgical treatments in and health tourism. Most of this problems still a thing today but, all this countries that have universal health care have at least take decision to improve or change problems. For example for controlling the long waiting list and somewhat the overuse, Spain developed a system in which instead of going to a big health care center, you go to a small local center with less technology, but normally enough to treat the normal injuries, and so in case of emergency the hospital and bigger health care centers are available. This may not be 100% efficient, and is also more expensive because you have to pay to the employers in the local small health care centers, but at least you fix another more important problem in which the live of persons were involved, because each second in a health emergency counts.

We can clearly see that fixing the problem, changing mentality for solving problems is one of the major advantages of universal health care, but the question is why doesn't the Unites States change of mentality? Who is the root for this problem?

The United States have been living in in this "irreality", in this "hiding the reality" attitude, in this "I close my eyes and when I open them the problem will be gone" and that's have being the problem. Back on times when all this countries were changing to universal healthcare, the States didn't change because they hide the problem, the prices were increasing but many people worked for business that included health insurance, so everything is fine, they said, we have a really good healthcare system with really advanced medicine and technology, they said, but they didn't said that they had a important amount of the population that didn't has access to this service, to this human right. Throughout the time this haven't change at all, and a 16% population suffers this problem nowadays still, and that is the real problem, the Unites States haven't fix his problems yet.

A big thing to notice is that this problem of not changing doesn't specifically come from the

government but from the population in general who don't accept the change, a population that is scared. People are scared of different things, most people who reject universal healthcare already have health insurance, which is the 84% of the population. This means that from that 84% of the population there are more possibilities that are more people not willing to change than people willing to from the 16% of the uninsured population. This people are scared of paying more than they do, especially if they are not wealthy enough and they are already making a big effort to pay for it. There is another big chunk of the population that this change inspires fear in, Republicans. Who mostly are afraid of losing part of the 84% of voters of those of the 10 millions benefited people (because some of them voted for Republicans).

In contrast, from part of the government, President Obama recently signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), also known as Affordable Care Act (ACA) or Obamacare, an act that has the objective of improving the quality and affordability of health insurance, decreased the percent of the uninsured population by expanding public and private insurance coverage, and reduce the cost of healthcare for individuals and the government. Obamacare pretend to improve the quality and lower healthcare cost by providing a free preventive care, protection against healthcare fraud, discounts to senior and tax credits in small business; and improve the access to healthcare by providing a health insurance marketplace. Being the cost and accessibility a big problem in the health care in the U.S, this act should sound pretty reasonable and likeable, but many people is against it, once again, the main problem show up.

People are against Obamacare so it won't get the country to have universal health care because a big part of country don't agree with Obamacare ideas, but then, it's all this Obamacare worth it? Did Obama make a right choice in bringing this program up? He certainly did. Nowadays it take a lot to change mentally of people because we believe that we have a good idea of everything, but that is not right, not even close. Obama realized how the States needed this change, how the United States is backwards with the rest of the world, like in some other things as measurement systems, but this one

being more important because it involve our health. So he decided to give another trie to the United States, and follow Nixon's legacy to get the country to be healthier.

So Obama, just as Nixon, won't probably accomplish it legitimate objective, but at least he is making an effort for waking up the population and led them into the right dark scaring path of change. Thanks to Obama, the United States took that little step in this path of change and now finally people start seen the light at the end of the path, like Robert H, a citizen who said "The folks who cry 'socialism' whenever 'Obamacare' is mentioned need to have an objective look at how health care operates in other countries because caring for your citizens should not be a profit industry, it should be caring and compassionate field.", and hopefully people keep fighting for the best for the country, for the healthiest and more reasonable, and hopefully they won't turn around a keep taking the shiny blinding path.

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