

A Unification View on Universal Healthcare

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September 30, 2013



“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9)

Obamacare. Universal healthcare. Private Insurance. Long lines in the U.K. Even longer lines in Canada. Forty million people without health insurance in the U.S. Mega-insurance companies fleecing people. Big pharma. Small business owners getting wiped out by medical mishaps.



If you live within earshot of American talk radio or TV news as I do, you will have heard some or all of the above. Discussing universal healthcare in the United States can be most contentious.

European, Canadian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, African, Asian, and American Unificationists will all approach this topic differently. Is there a Unification position on universal healthcare? Do the current systems available to residents of various countries reflect the ideal in any way?

Living a mere 45-minute drive from the Canada-U.S. border has caused me to ponder this topic and I’ll submit my conclusion first.

Neither government-run healthcare nor a system that is privately operated can be trusted to do a good job in providing adequate healthcare within the current circumstances. Human beings still lack the Godly virtues to keep the best interest of the public in mind and fall short, since none has mastered “living for the sake of others.”

The issue is not whether publicly funded or privately run healthcare is better. The problem is the moral and ethical quality of human beings and the solution lies in a moral reformation. When those involved in providing healthcare (government, medical practitioners, administrators, etc.) are comprised of individuals with the highest Godly qualities of the human spirit, an “ideal” health system will emerge.

My interest in the universal healthcare issue was strongly stimulated back in 1993 when UTS classmates Eric Holt, Jerry Chestnut and I took on the challenge at the annual UTS debate of defending Bill Clinton’s proposal to the U.S. Congress. This helped us to see both sides of the American arguments at the time.

I was born in Canada and have lived here most of my life. For ten years, I spent extensive periods in Germany, the U.K. and the U.S. and was able to observe the various healthcare systems to some degree. They are not all alike.

Last year, some of us listened to presentations under the banner of the “Freedom Society” that addressed the issue to some extent. Proposals were made for a return to the days where churches, charities and families took care of healthcare needs. I can remember the time before universal healthcare was established in Canada when doctors did house calls and Catholic nuns cared for the sick. I have strong doubts that returning to such a system is plausible. We also heard severe criticism of the U.K. and

Canadian healthcare systems. I simply had to laugh as I listened to the ill-informed comments which reflected more the well-known American talk radio show hosts than reality in Canada or the U.K.

The U.S. can provide the best healthcare in the world. It invests heavily in research and spends 16% of GDP on healthcare for its citizens. Yet, depending on who does the counting, the U.S. has between 30 and 45 million people uninsured or heavily under-insured.

Under-insured small business owners and the self-employed, for example, cannot afford to pay between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per month for total coverage and thus subscribe to catastrophic insurance to take care of major medical issues. They must then pay everything that is not “catastrophic” themselves.

The U.K., Germany, France, and Canada spend between 7-10% of GDP on providing healthcare for their citizens. The systems are somewhat different in each country.

The Canadian system provides adequate care for most. A few years ago, I underwent a preventative medical procedure. From the time the doctor recommended the procedure, it was smooth, quick and efficient. I have encountered friends, family and others, who have undergone treatment for cancer, heart disease and other issues. If the issue is serious, no one has complained of the treatment.

One friend who recently lost his spouse to cancer after a four-year battle, was indeed grateful that his wife was covered by universal healthcare. As the owner of a small business, he would have been literally wiped out financially if he had been in the U.S.

What is universal in Canada is the insurance. Each province has one insurer. Doctors are not employees of the state as they have private practices. The principal difference between the U.S. and Canada is that doctors in Canada deal with one insurer, and not between 10 and 20 competing insurers as in the U.S.

Universal insurance in Canada also means that you don't lose your coverage if you lose your job. It is transferrable from one location to another and from one province to another. Healthcare is a provincial jurisdiction.

An American doctor may often have to check which procedure is covered by the patient's insurer. A Canadian doctor can focus on which procedure is best for the patient. Of course, the Canadian system has its flaws

For example, there is a strain in emergency wards by some who abuse the system. Also, elective surgery is not provided as quickly. The introduction of user fees to dissuade those who show up in emergency rooms for common colds, bruises, etc., is considered a solution by many. The system needs tweaking.

Increasingly, private clinics are emerging in some parts of Canada. If you have the ability to pay, treatment is quickly available for, what some consider, non-essential treatment.

On the other hand, for the large percentage of the population who can't afford private clinics or quick trips to the U.S. for private care, the service provided in Canada is second to none.

Obamacare is unpopular in some quarters, but leaving close to 40 million Americans without healthcare is not a solution either. Because the issue has been so politicized, it seems that the real issues of healthcare for Americans have been blurred.

The insurance, pharmaceutical and legal establishments are playing both sides of the issue in the U.S. and will continue to benefit whatever the outcome of the current healthcare debate. The insurance industry will not suffer much, for even in countries where universal healthcare exists, they are thriving by consistently providing more creative products.

Neither government nor private industry can be trusted to do a good job in providing adequate healthcare, simply because no human being – government official or entrepreneur, doctor or administrator – has mastered “living for the sake of others.”

Unificationists hear much about Cheon Il Guk. It was once referred to as the “ideal” or Kingdom of Heaven. Theories were expounded about establishing a nation and so forth. What type of nation would emerge? What form of government and social system? Gun laws? Healthcare systems? Currently there exists no concrete framework. Headwing? Heavenly socialism? Free market? Juche?

A Unification position on universal healthcare would include a role for government as well as a role for private industry. For a successful system that is available to the entire population, there is a need for strong collaboration between the public and private sectors.

The origins of universal healthcare in Canada are primarily due to the efforts of Tommy Douglas, a Christian minister, who later became a prominent politician in the 1960s. It was the result of his direct experiences taking care of the needy in rural Canada. He once said, "There were little soup kitchens run by the churches and within the first half-hour they'd be cleaned out. After that there was nothing... It was impossible to describe the hopelessness." Douglas was also disturbed that members of socialist parties sat around quoting Marx and Lenin waiting for a revolution while refusing to help the destitute. That experience soured him to absolutists and he lost patience with people who wanted to sit back and talk about a blueprint for society but did nothing about it.

It is well known that one of the reasons for the growth of the early Christian church had much to do with efforts to take care of the sick and destitute. Likewise, modern universal healthcare in the West is deeply rooted in a Christian ideal.

The objective is an improvement of the quality of life for all citizens. The goal is certainly not to be at odds with 50% of the population at all times. The U.S., and indeed all countries, need to find a balance between good governance and the role of private industry.

This can only happen when there is a profound moral transformation at all levels of human society. It is the purpose of the providence to bring such a spiritual transformation about. Then and only then can there be a healthcare system that is equitable, fair and reflects the adage that we should take care of those in need. Ultimately, we are indeed our brother's and sister's keeper!

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