



# Editorial Comment

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Based on the results of the last election, it seems that most Americans believe we should have some sort of universal health care. The idea of obtaining care paid by the government or a selected third party has always sound appealing to the public. Nevertheless, universal health care may be associated with other unintended consequences that may create controversy once the system is implemented.

Many countries such as Great Britain have universal health care. In these countries it is very common for critical procedures to be denied to patients. In Sweden, the wait for heart surgery can be as long as 20 years. In Canada a Supreme Court Justice wrote "access to a waiting list is not access to health care".

Proponents argue that universal health care will promote preventive care. Sadly there is no evidence that expanding insurance coverage is a cost effective way to promote health. In fact, there is no demonstrable relationship between having health insurance and better health. The New England Journal of Medicine recently published a study showing that health insurance status is largely unrelated to quality of health care.

Another misconception about universal health care is that patients do not directly pay for medical costs. Of course this is incorrect as they will pay through taxation or employer contributions. Universal health care will require that government decides what constitute adequate coverage. This is a scary thought when we consider all the political lobbying that will occur in Washington from individual groups with their agendas. We may end with cost shifting instead of cost savings.

As H.L. Mencken said "for all problems, there is a solution that is simple, elegant and wrong".

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