



Editorial Comment

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A love of tradition has never weakened a nation, indeed it has strengthened nations in their hour of peril; but the new view must come, the world must roll forward.

—Winston Churchill

After attending two very important political events earlier this month at which healthcare reform was the topic, I jokingly mentioned to a friend of mine that El Paso must surely be the center of the universe. The presidents of the AMA, NMA and NHMA, plus the Chancellor of the UT system were all here at the same time in El Paso. In addition, the Commission to End Health Care Disparities was meeting here at UTEP. How wonderful for us! My friend commented back that we weren't the center of the universe, merely a mini-universe, a microcosm, of the healthcare problem. Is he right? In El Paso we have many levels of socioeconomic status, ethnicities, careers, races, political ideations and religious affiliations. At one of the events, there were African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and Caucasians; there were academics, community physicians, politicians, spouses; there were young and old, prominent figures and not-so-prominent ones. The only group missing from the debate was that of the patients.

Yet, wasn't everyone there attending this function also a patient?

When I first arrived in El Paso and was employed by Texas Tech, a misunderstanding in my contract left me without benefits. For six months, I was without health insurance. For six months, I needed health insurance. I survived only by charging lots of bills to my credit cards. It was very scary. I dreaded driving to work, praying that I wouldn't have an accident that would leave me having to pay hospital bills. During this same period, my younger sister was a struggling actress in New York City, also without health insurance. She had no fixed income and was paying disaster insurance out of her pocket. How is it that in 2002 in the United States, two educated, employed and intelligent women were without health insurance? It happened to my family and it happens everyday to many others.

I see the healthcare reform debate not about whether we are becoming more socialist or whether we need to give "handouts." I believe it is much more about understanding the fluidity of our positions in life. We can go from married to divorced, childless to parent, employed to jobless and insured to uninsured in the blink of an eye. I feel the debate needs to be viewed from three vantage points—that of physician, that of patient, and that of citizen.

If El Paso really is a microcosm, perhaps what can work here can work for our country. Keep informed and keep involved.

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