

Point of View

To Be Equal

RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH

By John E. Jacob

With the nation's health bill zooming into the stratosphere, there is an active search on for ways to control health costs. A barrier to cost control is the way the health care system discourages early detection of illnesses that, without proper care, could become chronic and life-threatening.

Private care based on fees for specific medical services tends to keep people out of doctor's offices unless something is seriously wrong. By then it may be too late.

Most insurance policies won't reimburse people for periodic checkups. So there is a monetary penalty attached to preventive measures that ultimately adds to the nation's health bill in the form of disease and hospitalization costs that might have been avoided by early detection in a health maintenance program.

Federal health budget cuts will perpetuate this. Slashes in funding for Community Health Centers, for example, will mean that local health centers serving millions of people will have to cut back services.

Poor people usually live in areas officially designated as medically underserved, with few doctors in private practice. Their primary care is at a community

health center or hospital. That's why the recent round of municipal hospital closings was so devastating to so many poor people.

Those closings meant sick people had to find a way to get across town to another hospital for treatment. Others ignored disease warning signals in the hope they could avoid



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the expenditure of money, time and energy involved in seeking health care.

Cuts in Medicaid will hurt, too. Already the program excludes half the poor.

Millions of people have no medical insurance at all. And in a deep recession such as the one we are now in, laid-off workers lose their employment-related health insurance coverage.

So much of the discussion about hospital costs and the role of insurance misses the point — a significant

portion of our population has no single, steady physician and no adequate insurance coverage.

The emphasis on the costs of sophisticated hospital equipment also misses another point — whatever the many miracles of modern medicine, the most immediate impact on the nation's health and on its health care bills don't involve hospitals at all.

Preventive medicine

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if encouraged, could save billions of dollars and many thousands of lives. A small investment in high blood pressure detection and treatment programs for example, would cut costs associated with stroke and heart disease, along with untimely deaths.

The biggest bang for the health buck would come from investments in care for pregnant women and infants. Regular medical monitoring of pregnancy and frequent checkups for infants and young children would reduce infant mortality rates and assure healthier lives for mother and child.

Costs associated with such programs are relatively modest, especially when care is in neighborhood health

clinics. But such programs are the first to go when budgets get cut.

Nutrition programs are also vulnerable, although healthy diets can make the difference between productive lives and lives damaged by disease.

Health experts are finally beginning to back the preventive medicine concept — the idea that practicing good health habits means healthier people

leading healthier lives.

And contrary to the stereotypes, people in poor neighborhoods are responding to opportunities for screening and early detection of illness, counseling on smoking and diet, and nutrition programs.

Their community clinics and organizations have been behind this surge of interest. More and more low income people are accepting their responsibility to lead healthier lives.

But society has a responsibility too, a responsibility to enable its poor to have equal access to quality health care; a responsibility to keep programs that provide the social and economic conditions that enable people to lead healthier lives.

PEOPLE, PLACES and POLITICS

By Joe Neal



Over the years, collective bargaining units or Unions have gained tremendous power in determining the course of collective bargaining in the country. It is now apparent that these Unions face their greatest challenge ever.

The challengers of these Unions are powerful conservatives in business and politics in the country. This group has as its aim to break the grip of labor. The present aspiration for this group is not new. But what is new is the cruelty in the way in which it is now working toward this aspiration.

For the past year or so we have witnessed many plants closing and millions have lost their jobs. Many reasons have been attributed to these closings and losses of jobs: inflation, high interest rates, the economy in general, and lastly, the Reagan administration's economic policies.

It is the latter, which comes closest to explaining what is wrong with the economy. Whatever is happening to the economy, we believe now that it is being orchestrated by the Reagan administration for the purpose of depressing the wage structure in this country and thereby breaking the Unions.

The process by which this is done in both business and government by the conservatives is to close plants and thus put people out of work. In government the method is to cut the budget, which usually means putting people out of work. As far as government is concerned, these methods are usually couched in terms of cutting government spending. These plays on words usually invoke the thought that government squanders away the people's money and something has to be done. The people sometimes forget that those who invoke such thoughts are those who help make the monetary decisions in the first place.

The action of these conservatives seems to imply that the working people are just mere animals and can be broken by not having a job; in other words, can be starved into submission.

Every day in the state of Texas the scenes of survival versus a decent wage are played out. Survival always wins.

Labor is gradually being stripped of its right to contract and is being pushed into the subservient role of taking whatever is offered in order to survive.

The benefits of this conservative action are greater enhancement of profit to the Conservatives themselves and a dominating control over the labor market. This could have a devastating effect upon labor Unions and to those who wish to sell or bargain their labor. The growing attitude is that "we own it, so if you want to play with it, you have to dance to our tune."

The problem with this attitude is that it sows the seeds for future disturbance and to seek changes in the structure of government itself.

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