



Medicare Reform: No Quick Fix

Medicare works best when it allows consumers to make good choices about their own health care — choosing the right doctor who can prescribe the right treatments, choosing the types of care that will keep seniors healthy and happy. But Medicare can go terribly wrong when your personal health care choices collide with the rules, regulations and restrictions of the federal government.

While Medicare is in need of reform, we should be cautious not to proceed down that path haphazardly. Although some changes to Medicare can improve it for seniors and America's disabled, we should recognize that others would take important choices away from beneficiaries, place excessive power in the hands of government bureaucrats, and create unnecessary financial strain.

Within the last few years, there have been several proposals in Congress that claim to change Medicare for the better. Unfortunately, these proposals have mostly been designed to be political “quick fixes” that fail to address the deeper problems the program faces. For example, some have suggested placing government price controls on medicines. This type of “quick fix” would do nothing more than place restrictions on the medicines that doctors could prescribe, interfere in the crucial medical decisions made by doctors and patients, and restrict research and development into new cures and better medicines.

Other plans would only place more power in the hands of government bureaucrats rather than where it belongs, with seniors and patients. These big-government solutions would force all Americans into a “one-size-fits-all” system of care where individual differences are neglected and decisions are made by distant bureaucrats instead of doctors. What’s more, these plans often come with high costs that would be unmanageable without tax increases. For these reasons, seniors, patients, and scores of others who would be affected have opposed big-government health care plans.

Around the world, people are beginning to recognize that government-run health care systems hurt the patients they are supposed to help. In Great Britain and Canada, for example, big-government health plans have lowered the quality of care provided to patients and seniors, created more bureaucratic red tape, and created financial problems that may jeopardize the plans for future generations of beneficiaries. Throughout the world, countries are beginning to recognize that the best health care is provided through systems where the public and private sectors are in partnership. In Germany and the Netherlands, experiments with free market solutions for health care are already underway, while in Switzerland, national health care is already provided entirely through private insurance carriers.

How Quick Fixes and Big Government Hurt Seniors and Patients

Unfortunately, some in Washington have looked down the path toward solutions to the Medicare problem that will not help the program's beneficiaries. Many plans are political "quick fixes" that are like the wolf in sheep's clothing – they look good at first glance but, upon further review, are detrimental to the interests of seniors and America's disabled.

Instead, these "quick fixes" threaten research and development into tomorrow's cures, increase costs for taxpayers, and fail to address any of the program's deficiencies. Other plans exacerbate the problems that Medicare already faces by placing taking choices away from beneficiaries and placing them in the hands of government bureaucrats.