

If I Ran the Zoo:

HOW TO DELIVER HEALTHCARE TO EVERY CALIFORNIAN

By Adam Frederic Dorin, M.D., MBA

In our state, nearly eight million people are medically uninsured. Millions more work one or more jobs, have inadequate insurance, and further drain already fiscally insolvent entitlement programs such as Medicare and Medi-Cal.

Our pop-culture, celebrity-worshipping, money-driven 'democracy' won't let true visionaries anywhere near the footsteps of the mansion of California's chief executive. Some say it's a jungle "out there," but I say it's more like a zoo — we're all stuck behind the bars of the status quo. But just imagine that we suspended our pessimistic disbelief — our old ways of doing business — and set out to deliver healthcare to every single state resident and, in doing so, set an example for the nation.

We could accomplish this feat together, without having to address the issue of illegal workers, and without raising one cent in taxes; we could even manage to make the healthcare field more competitive, with every doctor and nurse in the United States of America envying their colleagues who graduated from a California training program. The bar to our healthcare institutions would be set so high that we would create an indelible stamp of superior accomplishment for all to witness.

We will need only three things to proceed with this vision: a bit of intuition, a willingness to embark on change, and charity. This is how we could carry these virtues to fruition:

Beginning two years after implementation, every person accepted to an accredited nursing or medical doctor training program would be afforded a free education — an education completely paid for by the taxpayers of California. In exchange, every graduate (physicians after completion of their conventional residency training) would serve in the California Medical Corps (CMC) for four years. This service of forty-eight months would be required within five years of graduation from nursing or medical school. Preferably, most would complete this paid service when they are immediately available to do so; those who break their obligation (i.e., to serve and practice in-state) would be required to re-pay the cost of their education plus interest.

The CMC would assign practice locations, all of

which would be located within the borders of our state. After completion of the program's pay-back period, participants would be granted the opportunity to continue as junior and senior practitioners, or return to the 'private' sector. During the four years of recompense, every nurse and doctor would be required to take and complete a graduate-level degree program in business administration, hospital administration, epidemiology, terror and disaster preparedness, or healthcare leadership.

In addition to the initial training described above, the CMC would function as an organization capable of growing with each healthcare provider throughout his or her career. For those students who choose to continue with the program — and those more experienced individuals already in practice — the system would be able to incorporate providers willing to donate one day every other week in exchange for tax-deferred benefits (think of a permanent life insurance policy, where contributions are made by the state and participants are able to borrow back from their own accounts after the age of 65; the more time donated, the greater the tax-deferred benefit).

With this program in place, the State of California could look toward successfully driving (and sustaining) affordable and manageable medical care well into the next century.

I would be happy to crunch numbers to prove that my proposed program can be fiscally solvent, but who would believe me? Invariably, someone will either prove or disprove my projections based on their own point of view. Regardless, would it really matter if this or that detail of the program were revised or if the final numbers fell short of our goals? Clearly, we would find ourselves well ahead of where we are now. If we, as a state, decided to make this type of program happen, we would find a way to be successful.

We Californians can sit around all day and lament the horrible future that awaits us in the area of healthcare. After all, our state is falling further and further into debt, and we have no clear plan as to how we're going to provide even basic medical services to the growing millions of our medically uninsured neighbors. We can choose to dwell in a void of unworkable ideas, and even delude ourselves into feeling good about various articles of window-dressing legislation that merely serve to solve short-term problems. On the other hand, we could take charge of this place we call home, and make a better world for ourselves and our children.

Anyway, that's what I'd do ... if I ran the zoo.

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