

Nurses' guide to single-payer reform

Insuring America's health: Highlights from the January 2004 report from the Institute of Medicine

"More than 18,000 people die every year because they lack health insurance."

"It is estimated that the economic value lost because of poorer health and earlier deaths among uninsured Americans is between \$65 billion and \$130 billion annually."

"Uninsured Americans get about half the medical care of those with health insurance. As a result, they tend to be sicker and die sooner."

"The Committee concludes that further efforts to gradually expand coverage through incremental reforms are unlikely to succeed. Instead, the Committee proposes a clear and compelling goal—within 6 years, everyone in the United States should have health insurance."

"The lack of health insurance for tens of millions of Americans has serious negative consequences and economic costs not only for the uninsured themselves, but also for their families, the communities they live in and the whole country. The situation is dire and expected to worsen. The Committee urges Congress and the administration to act immediately to eliminate this longstanding problem."

"... 17.2 percent of the population under age 65 is uninsured and the number has grown to over 43 million. The situation is

more desperate now than when the study began, and it is expected to worsen in the foreseeable future because of federal and state budget constraints limiting public coverage programs, increasing costs of health care/insurance premiums, and continuing high rates of unemployment."

"Even one uninsured person in a family can put the financial stability and health of the whole family at risk. And a community's high uninsured rate can adversely affect the overall health status of the community, its

health care institutions/providers, and the access its residents have to certain services."

"Finding: Federal incremental reforms over the past 20 years have made little progress in reducing overall uninsured rates nationally..."

"Finding: Although some states have made significant progress in reducing the number of its uninsured citizens, even the states that have led major coverage reforms have large and persisting uninsured populations."

"The Committee recommends that the President and Congress develop a strategy to achieve universal insurance coverage and to establish a firm and explicit schedule to reach this goal by 2010."

"Instead of approaching the problem in tentative incremental steps, the Committee believes that citizens and policy makers should begin by setting as an explicit goal that the health insurance system should include everyone, then determine the private and public policies and actions necessary to achieve that end, and enact and implement those policies."

"The Committee concludes that major, comprehensive reform of the health insurance system, rather than expansion of the 'safety net,' is essential."

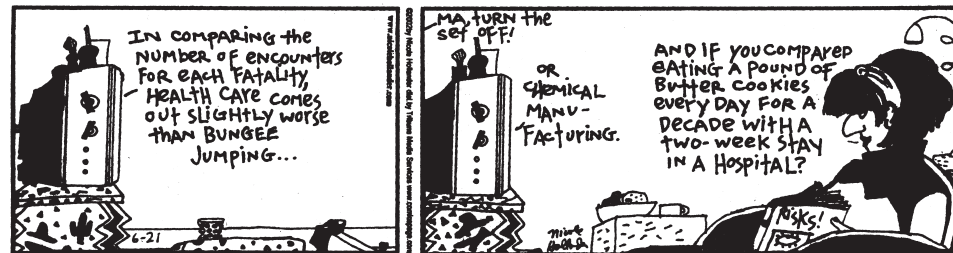
"... if financial access to health care services were assured, people would be able to choose among providers in their community and not be dependent upon safety-net institutions, as uninsured people are now. Also, the availability of payments from insurers could strengthen the financial stability of those providers and institutions, which are stressed by the current economy and growing demands for services."

To review the complete content of this report, visit <http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10874.html>.

SYLVIA by Nicole Hollander



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Supporters of S.686 joined the Worcester Area League of Women Voters in January to discuss their work on the single-payer health care initiative and their plans for moving forward.

Quotable

Lack of insurance affects national security

A major problem facing the military medical system may be the ill health of thousands of reservists—even before they ship out to battle zones.

Top Pentagon brass and congressional leaders fear that between the needs of reserve soldiers who are unable to deploy because of previous medical problems, the health issues of returning soldiers and a record number of troops in transit, the military medical system may be in very ill health.

"Just like you've read the reports about the large numbers of Americans who don't have any medical insurance, a percentage of those are reservists," said John O'Shea of the Reserve Officers Association. "When families have reduced incomes, one of the things they normally consider a luxury, believe it or not, is medical care or dental care."

Source: "Army facing medical crisis," Robert Schlesinger, *Boston Globe*, 12/13/03 ■