

# WITH EYES TO SEE



## HEALTH CARE II

In the November 2009 edition of *With Eyes to See*, we explored hopeful models of health care in other countries, with a focus on Concern America's successful health promoter training model in Latin America. It was hoped that by this spring, this current edition would focus on health care in the United States by looking at the newly passed health care reform legislation; as this goes to press, Congress has still not passed much needed (and promised) health care reforms. Why?

Is this yet another example of government gridlock due to entrenched partisan politics? Is our health care system so complex that passing legislation that truly reforms how care is provided and paid for in this country is virtually impossible? Is this simply not the "right moment" to pass such legislation, when various factors coincide and the American public overwhelmingly demands major changes, such as when Medicare and Medicaid were created in 1965? All of the above?!

In order to help students and teachers navigate some of the issues surrounding health care in this country, and, therefore, be better able to understand the current debate and formulate their own opinions on health care reform, this edition of *With Eyes to See* will begin by focusing on the question, "Is Health Care a Right?" Students will be asked to compare the constitutions of a few countries around the world to help them wrestle with this question.

In addition, classroom activities have been designed and are presented here, along with a list of resources, in order to engage students as they wrestle with other complex issues surrounding health care in the U.S. and around the world. Students will compare the health care system of the U.S. with that of Canada, our nearest neighbor, an exercise that can be quite informative and enlightening. Students will also look at various health-related statistics which can be very helpful in forming opinions about the current health care debate. Resources highlighted here include information on papers, radio programs, additional lesson plans, and films. It is also important to note that these activities and resources, due to the often complex nature of this topic, are geared towards older students and teachers in general.

It is hoped that these activities and resources will help students wade through the current health care debate, and empower them to look at health care from a global perspective. ¡Salud!

ideas for  
teachers

who want  
to  
integrate  
social  
justice  
concepts

into what  
and how  
they teach

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2010

CONCERN AMERICA

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### Is Health Care a Right?

In our world today, what is a right? We have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written in hopes of giving our world a human rights' standard by which every person in every country is treated. Similarly, most countries have constitutions that lay out the rights of their citizens. Of course, what is guaranteed on paper does not necessarily translate into practice, and there is often debate about what actual government programs should be in place based on a people's constitutional rights. Try the following:

1. Ask the students as a group, "What is a right?" It may be helpful to use a dictionary to share the various definitions of the word, especially those relating to people and their governments.

2. Have the students write independently, reflecting on the question "Is Health Care a Right?" In the group, have students share their responses and then discuss them.

3. Using the previous two conversations/questions as a basis, provide the students with examples of the constitutions of three or more countries, focusing on the sections most closely related to health. The following are three suggestions, though any number of countries/examples could be used; the European Union constitution is being used here since it covers many countries.

- European Union: "Article II-95, Health care: *Everyone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices. A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union policies and activities.*"

- United States: there is no specific reference to health care in the U.S. Constitution, but the Preamble to the Constitution states that one of its goals is to "promote the general welfare." As well, Article II, Section 8 states "The Congress shall have Power to . . . provide for the . . . general Welfare..."

- Iraq: the current Iraqi Constitution, written in large part by the U.S., states in Article 31: "First: Every citizen has the right to health care. The State shall maintain public health and provide the means of prevention and treatment by building different types of hospitals and health institutions." Elsewhere, special provisions are laid out for children, the elderly, and the disabled.

- U.N. Declaration of Human Rights: "Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..."

4. After sharing these and/or other examples, ask the students to write down their thoughts, and share them in the larger group. A few guiding questions that may be useful: "In which country is health care a constitutionally-protected right?" "Does the fact that a country's constitution guarantees health care necessarily mean that its citizens have access to good health care? (Most European countries have highly rated health care systems; Iraq is still struggling to provide even basic care to the majority of its citizens, for example). "Is health care a right in the U.S.?" (it would be worthwhile here to point out that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that Social Security is constitutional, under which both Medicare and Medicaid were created).

5. Have the students write op ed pieces for their local newspaper answering the question, "Is Health Care a Right?"

"The real fight is about what should be in the marketplace and what should not. Should education be a marketable commodity? Should health-care?"  
-Susan George, Transnational Institute

"In the sick room, ten cents' worth of human understanding equals ten dollars' worth of medical science."  
-Martin H. Fischer

## Health Care by the Numbers

During the recent health care summit hosted by President Obama, many Republicans stated that the majority of Americans were not in favor of the current health reform bill; many Democrats said that most Americans were for it. Who was right? Both groups were right! Consider the following: in a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll, it was found that 42 percent of Americans supported the Democrats' health reform plan, while 41 percent were opposed to the effort, with 16% undecided. However, the poll also found that a majority supported the bill more after hearing about some of its elements.

Statistics have a way of cutting through rhetoric, helping to frame understandings of an issue; they can also be selectively chosen, as in the example above, to support a certain viewpoint. Share the following health care related statistics with the students to help jump start a discussion about health care reform in the U.S. The goal with this exercise is not necessarily to come up with answers, but to generate questions that the students could send to their Senators and Representative, requesting answers from them or one of their staffers. These are just a selection of stats; many more and/or others could be used. To find out how to contact your Congresspeople, visit <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>.

- Number of uninsured individuals in the U.S.: 47 million
- Number of the uninsured living in families headed by people currently employed: 83%
- Half of all health care in the U.S. is paid for by the government (through Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans/military health services)
- The increase in costs of health care in the U.S. is double the growth in wages and inflation
- If no health care reform is passed, up to 56 million people are projected to be without health insurance by 2013
- CEO's at the 6 largest nonprofit, tax exempt hospital systems all make more than \$1.2 million/year
- In France, its 62 million citizens are healthier, on average, than people in the U.S., and the country spends half on health care of what is spent in the U.S.

## U.S. vs. Canada (not hockey, but health care)

The United States' neighbor to the north, Canada, has a single-payer, mostly publicly-funded health system, while the U.S. has a multi-payer, heavily private system. One of the most important reasons for comparing the two country's systems, considering that economically, culturally, and geographically both are similar, is that the Canadian system seems to do more (or at least deliver very comparable service overall), while spending much less than in the U.S. By one estimation, Canada spends close to 10% of GDP on health care, while the U.S. spends 17%. For these and other reasons, the two country's offer a unique situation for study.

Many background resources exist to help set-up a classroom comparison of the two systems (a simple internet search will yield many credible results). Also, the site [www.econedlink.org](http://www.econedlink.org) has a prepared curriculum titled *The Price We Pay for Health: U.S. and Canada*, found for free at their website.

For activities, try dividing the class into U.S. and Canada. Have each group research the benefits of "their" system, and hold a classroom debate on the issue.

"In 2009 [in the U.S.], total health care costs increased to 17.3 percent of GDP, [while] the rest of the club of affluent countries manages to insure everyone for 9 or 10 percent of GDP, and have a healthier and longer-lived population, to boot. They do it, of course, through universal, socialized insurance."  
-Robert Kuttner, The American Prospect

# RECOMMENDED

"America's health care system is second only to Japan... Canada, Sweden, Great Britain, ... well all of Europe. But you can thank your lucky stars we don't live in Paraguay!"  
-Dan Castellaneta

"A hospital should also have a recovery room adjoining the cashier's office."  
-Francis O'Walsh

## RESOURCES

- Two Public Radio programs have recently produced a number of informative and entertaining stories on health care: This American Life ([www.thisamericanlife.org](http://www.thisamericanlife.org)) ran two, full-hour segments covering the health care debate, health insurance, hospitals doing more for less, and more: #391 *More is Less*, and #392 *Someone Else's Money*. The other program is Planet Money, which focuses on the economic side of the health care debate: ([www.npr.org/blogs/money/health\\_care/](http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/health_care/)).
- There are two films that may be of great use: (1) Filmmaker Michael Moore's documentary on health care *Sicko* ([www.michaelmoore.com/books-films/sicko](http://www.michaelmoore.com/books-films/sicko)); (2) FRONTLINE and the Washington Post created the 2008 piece *Sick Around the World* which compares the health care systems in the U.S. and five other capitalist democracies ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)).
- The Mercy Corps' Global Envision program provides lesson plans for teachers, with a number focused on health issues around the world ([www.globalenvision.org/forteachers/29/1222](http://www.globalenvision.org/forteachers/29/1222)).
- Two very good papers on health care: (1) *Learning from High Performance Health Systems Around the Globe* by Karen Davis and the Commonwealth Fund ([www.commonwealth-fund.org](http://www.commonwealth-fund.org)), and *The Right to Health Care and the Role of Government in Health Policy* by Carolyn Engelhard and Arthur Garson ([www.millercenter.org/public/debates/healthcare](http://www.millercenter.org/public/debates/healthcare)).

## CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Mozambique, and West Africa.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in California which include:

- \* Walk Out of Poverty
- \* Infusion Methodology Workshops for teachers
- \* "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- \* School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- \* Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

## Join Us! Concern America's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Walk Out of Poverty and 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Dance Out of Poverty: March 27, 2010

For more than a decade Concern America has held the increasingly successful Walk Out of Poverty in southern California, an event that provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa. In 2008, Concern America held its first annual Dance Out of Poverty with the same goals. If you live in the Orange County, California or Chicago, Illinois regions, join us!



Call Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. In the Chicago region, call 773-772-9523.