

MEDICAL CARE SHOULD BE  
PROFESSIONAL WITH A HUMAN TOUCH

We have started to turn the corner to the quadrennial contest of the national election to the highest office. During the next eighteen months, we will hear convincing information about *how* and *why* all Americans should be able to receive health care.

As a long-time student of health care delivery, I experienced an indirect flashback over the weekend. I rented several of the old Star Wars movies for my viewing pleasure. In one particular movie, Luke Skywalker gets his right hand cut off. Somehow he manages to keep the severed hand, holding it with his other hand, and is shown in a spacecraft medical clinic with a robot doctor sewing his hand back on. I don't think Luke paid the robot doctor or anyone else for that medical service.

Back in the 1960s there were heated debates about socialized medicine. I never really understood what socialized medicine was, but most people thought it was bad. It had something to do with the government setting rates of payment, patients having to go to preselected practitioners without the benefit of choice, and a lot of paperwork concerning eligibility, income levels, and family size. In short, socialized medicine meant that there would be a lot of hoops that people would have to jump through before they would receive medical care.

During the first term of the Clinton Administration everyone was promised an assembly line national health care card "that could never be taken away." In an ironic way, that promise has come to pass; because I



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never received the card, it can never be taken away from me.

The American people need to understand that most doctors become doctors because they like to help people. It takes a long time to become a doctor, and it's very expensive. Most doctors have student loans that keep them in debt for many years after they begin practice. Also, doctors have a life; they are not robots like the one that treated Luke. The majority of the public still considers all doctors to be rich. For example, if I go to the hospital and something goes wrong, I can sue for money. Now, if it turns out that a nurse is at fault, there is no sense suing because nurses don't have any money—they are not rich. But if I can show that somehow a doctor is at fault, I'm tempted to sue the rich doctor.

Some doctors are, of course, rich. However, doctors are a national resource for the

health of our nation, and on a local level, the health of our community. Let's be honest, we all need or will need doctors at some time in our life. Having met the requirements of becoming a doctor should afford that person the rewards of a high income, social status, job security, and job satisfaction. If you have a doctor you like and can trust, that's 50% of the health problem solution. Let's not make the doctor's life financially dismal. We need each other. Which health plan would you choose on Election Day: a real doctor that you have to pay or a robot that you can see for free?