

Is it Time for Universal Healthcare in the US?

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INTRODUCTION

There is a long-time debate on whether health care is a human right or privilege in the United States, and the question has become very political in recent years. Lack of health care coverage is a common problem for many US citizens, and there has been few changes since the passing of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010. The ACA allowed many low-income individuals to gain access to quality care at an affordable cost, yet there are several people that do not qualify for Medicaid and are unable to afford health insurance. According to the Center of Disease Control (2017), 30.1 million people in the US remain uninsured today. Many citizens believe that it is a privilege to only those who can afford it because it is a commodity. Most industrialized nations provide healthcare to citizens as a right. The WHO believes that “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition” (O’Rourke, 2017). Quality healthcare is a right to all individuals to promote health, prevent diseases, and to treat and manage those with illness. A sick individual should be entitled to seek health care in their country even if they are unable to pay.

SIGNIFICANCE

Nurses can influence health care policy as health professionals and patient advocates. Several professional nursing groups such as the American Nurses Association and Sigma Theta Tau promote policy formulation for health care rights of all individuals.

Healthcare laws directly effect the nurse and their patients because much of healthcare relies on nursing for success. Expanding coverage of care to more people can put more strain on the workforce of preventative care, wellness programs, long term disease management, and other initiatives, which is highly reliant on nursing (ANA, 2020).

POSITION STATEMENT

Healthcare is a human right, not a privilege.

SUPPORT FOR POSITION

There are disparities in the access to care for individuals who do not have health insurance. The uninsured are less likely to seek preventive care and other services for major health conditions than those who have coverage.

- In 2018, 1 in 5 people went without needed medical care due to the cost of services (Tolbert et al., 2019). If they do seek care, many are unable to obtain the treatments and medications that are not covered due to the cost of care and are unable to obtain follow-up care.
- They are unable to receive care early on and must seek care after their disease or condition has worsened. With higher acuity, these patients end up consuming a greater number of resources than would have been used earlier on if they were able to seek care (Maruthappu et al., 2013).
- If hospitalized, they receive fewer diagnostic tests and treatment services than those with insurance, often leading to much higher mortality rates (Tolbert et al., 2019).

The US government provides all citizens with several essential human services.

- Military protection, public education, and access to police and fire services are all basic human rights.
- Other industrialized nations believe that healthcare is a human right and every citizen should have access to it through accessible healthcare for a better society (O’Rourke, 2017).
- This does not equal free care for all. The right to health care ensures that the government must ensure that “medically necessary care, regardless of ability to pay, whether provided in the private or public sectors, is available and accessible to all” (O’Rourke, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Nurses are health care providers that must practice with integrity, and ethics are foundation for their practice. Patients have the right to be treated equally and just regardless of their ability to pay. Nurses must act as patient advocates in all aspects of practice and must fight for the belief that all individuals have the right to high quality healthcare. Nursing organizations act as policymakers to advance public health and work towards healthcare reform, they often reach out to governments and speak publicly about their beliefs. A lack of affordable healthcare in the world’s wealthiest country shows how much responsibility nurses and other healthcare professionals must take to advocate for their patients.



The Nation. (2019).

Currently, nurses have a large focus on tertiary care in urban, densely-populated areas. With a shift to affordable health care for all, it would allow for:

- More access primary and preventative healthcare, rather than diagnosing and treating conditions too late.
- Less worry about costs and not being able to afford treatments and prescribed medications.
- Fewer ER visits and shorter hospital stays

More healthcare would allow more patients to be seen. This could potentially change the role of the nurse. Changes would need to be put in place to maintain the competency and productivity of nurses, along with increasing their roles and responsibilities in patient care.

CONCLUSION

The United States is one of the few industrialized countries without a form of universal healthcare in place. Evidence from other countries with systems in place show an increase in access to quality care and improved health outcomes. Nurses must advocate for quality healthcare that is both attainable and affordable to all, regardless of social and economic conditions. Access to healthcare can catch preventable and treatable diseases early on, so that individuals do not have to seek medical treatment too late that is often at a much higher cost. People should be able to seek care without fear of costs. The United States needs to put their citizens first and provide affordable and attainable healthcare because it is a fundamental human right.

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