

Over the past 5 weeks I have been discussing ways that we can lower the exorbitant health care costs in this country. We have by far the most expensive health care system in the world, yet the U.S. population is less healthy than most other modern nations.

There is a lot that we can do to change this both on the improvement of the quality of our care and especially in the reduction of the cost. In these articles I have been discussing the cost issue and I will summarize my opinions here.

We need to use diagnostic and treatment methods that have the most scientific evidence behind them. Often times doctors are too quick to try new medications and treatments, even though there is less evidence for the effectiveness of the new methods than for the tried and true methods. When it comes to medication, doctors often prescribe medications for conditions that they have never been studied for.

If the science is limited (which often it is), then the procedures that are lower cost and lower risk should be used first.

Doctors need to be better trained in developing their diagnostic skills so that they are less dependent on expensive technology and more dependent on listening to the patient.

Patients need to be educated to know what conditions are better left to home remedies such as most colds and flu, and which need medical intervention.

Our entire health care system needs to become less insurance dependent. Insurance brings with it bureaucracy which means money is being spent to manage that bureaucracy. Insurance also removes consumerism from our health care system. People are less likely to worry about choosing the most cost effective healthcare when they don't have to pay for it directly. Doctors and hospitals are less inclined to compete with each other on price as a result.

Insurance should be used more for the more serious health issues and less for the day to day minor illnesses.

Our emergency rooms need to be devoted to true emergencies. Government regulators need to allow hospitals to triage their patients and those who do not have a true emergency need to be referred to outpatient clinics where the cost of delivering service is much less.

Finally, we need to understand that we bring most illnesses on our selves. Research shows that most illnesses that we suffer in this country are due to poor lifestyle choices. By making better choices we can dramatically reduce our need for health care and thus dramatically reduce its cost.