Health Care Reform: What Went Wrong

To the Editor:

Improvements cannot be made without criticisms, but to get too far can give birth to problems greater than the original ones. Before looking at the American medical system, one should have a profound experience of other medical systems. All too often, there is a significant discrepancy between the “real world” and articles written by “economists” or “politicians,” and often this discrepancy is based on many other interests, including those of health insurers, of politicians searching for some kind of notoriety, and of industries. I basically disagree with Dr Trunkey, who I deeply respect for his life dedicated to surgery. The American system has many positive qualities that other systems do not have, and these qualities should be maintained, for example, control of care, peer review, careful and honest attention to the results of new and old forms of medical treatment, and the high quality of training and high standards of morality among doctors and nurses. To these aspects, we should add the passionate interest of the media for the well-being of the community, as this is a driving force of paramount importance.

The American medical system suffers some of the social conflicts of the American society that are reflected both in the health system and in many other aspects of everyday life: significant difference between the salaries of rich people and those of poor people, too many homeless in the richest country in the world (when to build free houses for them could be cheaper than to pay the damages caused by the homeless themselves), jails full of less lucky people (when to provide these people with some kind of opportunities before they are involved in crime could cost much less than to pay the expenses to have them in prison), good education for the children of rich people, and low-level schools for the children of poor people. In this scenario, one cannot believe that the basic principles of the American society that underline the importance of meritocracy and efficiency, which have made the United States the leader in the world, will not be applied unconsciously even in the health system. If a true reform should be made (and probably it is the right time to do so in America), this should include all aspects of the social life where each single person is respected for his or her individuality and not for what he or she can give to the system or for the level of taxes he or she pays. I think that it is not possible to make the basic changes in the health system Dr Trunkey hopes without appropriate changes in the philosophical interpretation of life.

Despite these negative aspects, I do believe, from my direct experience working in other medical systems, that the American system has the potential to become the best medical system in the world, with little reforms, introduced slowly into everyday life, without the need of an astonishing revolution, which usually destroys before building. The American medical system should not be destroyed.

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