

## **Solutions for Quality Health Care**

By Robert D. Ray, R, former Governor of Iowa  
and Paul G. Rogers, D, former Congressman from Florida

Over the past several weeks, prominent individuals have been writing about the problems in our health care system and the need for comprehensive health care reform to fix those problems.

It's good news that there are solutions that can provide affordable, quality health care for all Americans. And those solutions are not only doable, they are affordable. In fact, the cost of inaction – of not doing what is necessary to fix the system – is greater than the cost of needed action. It is not more money we need, it's a better system for delivering and paying for health care, and we need it now.

A recent international survey released by the Commonwealth Fund reported an astonishing finding: of six Western nations examined, the U.S. leads all of them in the number of medical errors, out-of-pocket health care expenses, and people going without health care services due to costs. And this is in spite of the fact that the U.S. spends twice as much per capita on health care as any other industrialized nation in the world.

The fact is, we can change the system, and we can afford to pay for it, as well.

Like CodeBlueNow!, the National Coalition on Health Care is rigorously non-partisan. Our Honorary Chairmen are former Presidents George H.W. Bush, Jimmy Carter and Gerald R. Ford. Our members are major businesses, unions, patient advocacy and consumer groups, associations of health care providers, health and pension funds, insurers, and religious denominations. We believe that an effective response to our health care crisis is more than urgently needed. But it requires leadership. Now.

In Seattle, CodeBlueNow! invited ideas on what a system could look like. You, who responded, said you want a system that promotes the health and well-being of all the people in the community and does not bankrupt families or businesses – or our country. You said you wanted a system that was based on wellness, covered all the people and used one claim form – preferably electronic – and one medical record.

Your ideas are consistent with those our Coalition has been working to bring about.

**We must cover everyone** – we cannot fix the system without assuring everyone has coverage. It just won't work otherwise. Why? Because without having everyone in the system costs cannot be controlled and quality cannot be improved. The Coalition has laid out four options for covering everyone, and any one, or a combination, will work, but participation must be mandatory.

**It is affordable to do this** – we have priced out each of the four options, and combinations of one or more, and each would save money over time. The country can pay for it – and even pay less than it does now – through a number of mechanisms – general tax revenues, earmarked taxes and fees, employer contributions, individual contributions. We are the only industrialized nation that does not cover all its citizens. We should be able to figure out how to do so.

**The costs can be managed** – we believe that with a rational system in place, cost can be managed. Right now, nothing or very little is actually being managed. Incentives for providers, patients, and purchasers for more rational behavior can be created, which will decrease costs for all.

**Quality and safety can be improved** – if the focus is on outcomes, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness system-wide, huge leaps in the quality of patient care could be made across the entire system, not just in a state, an individual community, an employer or an insurance company.

**Administration can be simplified** – We are buried in needless paper forms for everything from ordering services to billing various payers. The complexity of our current system consumes an amazing amount of money. The nation spends nearly \$300 billion a year in administrative costs.

The status quo is not working. While there are many encounters that produce good outcomes and while there are wonderful individual providers, they are not able to do the best that they could because the system prevents them from doing so. What doctor wants to turn patients away? Well, they are now because they cannot afford either reimbursement rates they are paid by some government programs or the malpractice premiums in their state.

What person doesn't want to know that he/she or he is getting care based on research that demonstrates what is most effective? Who would not like to see less paperwork? Who would not like to see lower costs? Who would not want to have one simple, uniform medical record?

But until everyone is covered, the system will not be less complex. And it is that very complexity that drives costs and negatively affects quality.

We believe that we, as a nation, are capable of fixing the system. CodeBlueNow! started with the public voice and has come to the same conclusions.

So, now, it is time to start that Revolution of ideas and vision that former Governor John Kitzhaber, MD so eloquently called for in October. We urge you to join us in a course of action that can be charted to create a healthy health care system that works for Americans, not against them.

*Robert D. Ray, the former Republican Governor of Iowa and Paul G. Rogers, the former Democratic Congressman from Florida, co-chair the National Coalition on Health Care.  
[www.nchc.org](http://www.nchc.org)*