
Interview: Dr. Stephen C. Cohen

HMOs Fail Because They Abuse Patients

Dr. Cohen is Executive Vice President of the National Organization of Physicians Who Care, based in San Antonio, Texas. He was interviewed by Marianna Wertz on June 5.

EIR: Can you tell me what the Physicians Who Care are doing with respect to managed care? I work with Lyndon LaRouche, and he, in his Presidential campaign, has said that managed care should be abolished, that emendations of it are not going to work, that it's fundamentally flawed.

Cohen: I would agree with that. We have been fighting managed care at every possible level you can. We try primarily to educate patients about the dangers of managed care. We try to educate physicians about the dangers of managed care. We try to steer them to insurance programs that are less invasive into their lives. We try to help them with individual clinical decision-making, when they have a problem, when they're being abused. We tell them where to go and what resources are available for them to fight the people who are making medical decisions on the basis of economics.

We support candidates who are for patient protections, who are opposed to managed care. So, we have met with a number of Congresspersons.

EIR: Is that just in Texas or nationwide?

Cohen: We have members in a lot of different states, so we try to go through whatever local access we have to Congressmen. For instance, with Patients Who Care, we have people who've met with Congress in Washington and we have webpages. We have a webpage that's called The HMO Page (www.hmopage.org), where we answer questions. We have the Patients Who Care Page (www.PWC.org). We have an MSA page (www.msapage.org) [which promotes the idea of Medical Savings Accounts], where we encourage people to go into insurance where they primarily run the show, as opposed to insurance companies. We have a Patients Who Care page (www.pwc.org/patients-htm), where we try to basically influence patients to understand the dangers of managed care and try to give them information available on that and what their resources are and basically how to deal with this, which is a horror for everybody's life.

EIR: You say you that agree that managed care ought to be abolished. What would it take to do it?

Cohen: I agree that it ought to be abolished because I think

it's bad for health care. At the same time, I don't know that I think it ought to be abolished, because, as a basically conservative person, I believe there may be people who want to do that, and I don't think they should be deprived of their right to do that. So, from that point of view, I don't think it would be right to have dictatorial legislation saying you can't have HMOs. I just think that they ought to be monitored in a way, and restricted in a way that is good for everybody who would be in the program. And therefore, it won't work! It will die from its own weight, which is what is happening now, actually. This is a program that is in retreat in every city and every state in the country.

EIR: I saw that, in Texas, they're mostly losing money.

Cohen: They're losing money in almost every environment. The more Congress looks at them, to protect the citizenry, the more they fail, because they have been abusing their patients. If they do the right thing for the patient, this [managed-care] concept adds a whole layer of costs that are unnecessary and not beneficial. So, they are falling by the wayside. Cigna announced this week the withdrawal of 104,000 people from the Medicare program.

EIR: How are HMOs affecting people on Medicare?

Cohen: It's going to have a major impact for a period of time, but people are going to be happier on the outside. They're going to have to pay more out of pocket, but the care is going to be of better quality, with people taking care of them who have a better interest in their personal needs, rather than physicians who make decisions based on economics.

Doctors have been criticized because they do things and they make money. Now, we're criticized because we don't do things and we make money. The latter is much worse, it's much more egregious, especially for capitalism! We think it's better to overdo things, than not to do them, on the basis of financial gain. That's basically our philosophy. You should be doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason. That reason shouldn't be economics on either side of the bar. The doctor ought to do things because it's the right thing to do medically, and he should make that decision with his patients and the family. If it costs money, so be it. If it costs money not to do it, which is what happens a lot of times when you don't do certain services—until you needed managed care and health maintenance, they did none of that. What they hoped was that you'd go into another program if you got sick.

EIR: And Governor Bush? What's his record?

Cohen: I think Governor Bush has not really been very sympathetic. We tried to get a Patients Protection Act passed, and he vetoed it. He says HMOs are bad, but he doesn't have a very good proposal. And he did reject the state's legislation on patient protections; he did not sign that. On the other hand, we do have legislation in the state where HMOs can't hide anymore: They can be sued, and he didn't reject that.