

Kennedy: We don't need any doctors

Speaking at a conference on Medicine in the Third World in Washington, D.C. in February 1979, Senator Edward Kennedy put forward his view of health care for the developing nations and for the United States:

American industrial, high technology for the model of health care has hurt medical care in the United States, and we cannot allow it to be established elsewhere. ... We need primary care facilities; facilities that will be run by local people to solve local problems. We need simple basic systems constructed from the ground up by people...with a simple, basic drug list to meet local needs.

We produce 25,000 pharmaceuticals in the United States; we cannot and should not export these. These drugs do not meet the needs of these people any more than costly diagnostic equipment does. They are simple people with simple problems. They have pain which should be alleviated and it should be alleviated without using procedures or equipment that will frighten them. We must develop a list of essential drugs: aspirin, penicillin, malaria pills, as well as local herbal medicines that people can feel comfortable with.

In the United States...

We would do better to close down centers. That would provide for basic needs as well as contain costs. You don't need a physician on duty; paraprofessionals can tend to most problems, particularly in our urban poor centers. They can provide palliative care and appropriate drugs at a reasonable cost.

intensity and competence of treatment that saves lives.

The move to close down the nation's hospitals will not only affect the elderly. Only hospitals can provide the high-technology, high-intensity health infrastructure upon which all clinics, family practices, and other services must ultimately rely. To gut hospitals is to destroy national health care.

5. Genocidal alternatives.

The Health Resources Distribution Fund will carry out projects "for the stimulation and support of health maintenance organizations, community health centers, migrant health centers, and other cost-effective health care delivery systems." What does this mean? In the urban areas across the country—as in the ghettos of New York City—this means closing the hospitals and their replacement with low-grade walk-in clinics, manned mainly by paraprofessionals, not doctors. According to the Kennedy-funded Georgetown Health Policy Center, one of the designers of the Kennedy bill, the purpose of the Health Maintenance Organizations is "to eliminate the second visit, that is, to make sure the patient doesn't come back." Primary screening and diagnosis of patients would not be performed by doctors but by paraprofessionals and nurses.

In addition, the "National Health Board shall provide for the conduct of demonstration projects to evaluate the feasibility of providing hospice services as part of basic covered health-care services." Euthanasia is mandated by the Kennedy bill as national policy. The terminally ill, the old will simply not be treated at all.

In summary then, the Kennedy bill provides for a health care system that is capable of providing minimal services for the most common, medium-level diseases. The seriously ill, the terminally ill, the old, and the young with serious diseases are left without hope.

6. No provision for basic research.

Kennedy's attitude toward advances in medicine is adequately reflected in his Kennedy-Javits bill for a Pharmaceutical Revision Reform Code of 1978. The bill would deprive pharmaceutical companies of their research and development capabilities through a divestiture of drug patent rights after a 60-month period.

To solve the nation's number one killers, heart disease and cancer, requires serious basic research. It requires an Apollo program-style project in basic biology, including in such areas as genetics, embryology, the immune system, neurophysiology, and in-depth research into the area of degenerative diseases and aging generally.

Second, to find cures for the major killer diseases requires widespread trials of new treatments in hospitals and clinics across the country. The early diagnosis of these diseases requires the creation and use of high-technology methods.

None of these basic steps are provided for by the Kennedy bill. Instead, the Kennedy bill acts to minimize diagnosis and treatment of these diseases. It is not the purpose of the Kennedy bill to eliminate disease or to save lives. What is its purpose? To provide Americans with a quicker, cheaper way to die.