

PRESIDENT CARTER'S HEALTH PLAN (Originally published September 1978)

Just over a month ago, the Sunday paper's feature story was about President Carter's health plan.

CARTER UNVEILS THE OUTLINE OF HIS NATIONAL HEALTH PLAN

said the front-page headline. Printed in a box alongside the story were his ten hoped-for goals.

Since beginning his campaign for the Presidency, one of Carter's prime ambitions has been the nationalization of this country's health services. His delay in setting forth a program has been occasioned by inflation, the unfavorable economic position of the country and some second thoughts about its cost. However, on many occasions since taking office, he had promised that soon he would present his medical plan. Most of the medical profession—at least, most of the practicing medical profession—had been waiting uneasily for his proposal.

Perhaps, in view of his indecisiveness and past performance, we shouldn't have been so apprehensive. Expecting a bombshell, we got only a weak bloop. Of the ten numbered goals, there was not one stated in concrete terms.

- Everyone should have health coverage.
- Quality care available for all.
- Freedom of choice.
- Reduce unnecessary spending.
- Greater efficiency.
- Financing through government and patient contribution.
- A significant role for private insurance.
- Promote out-patient and preventive care in cities and rural areas.
- Assure consumer representation and, finally,
- A gradual approach with no increase in federal spending for health care until 1983, a sop to every interest.

In summary, a bland hodgepodge of goody-goody words, vague enough to antagonize no one, and indefinite enough to mask any real intentions.

Having digested Mr. Carter's ten principles, we don't know a great deal more about where he stands than we did six months ago. His gradual approach, with no increased

federal spending for the next five years, may be loophole enough for a divided and reluctant Congress to do its best to ignore the whole matter. It is also quite possible that in less than five years, Jimmy Carter will be back in his Plains warehouse counting peanuts and writing memoirs.

Columnist James Kilpatrick thought that Carter begged the question and labeled his program "pussyfooted." He feels there is no convincing evidence of public demand for the kind of program Carter has in mind. He said furthermore, "Until a convincing case can be made in support of national health insurance in America, the details are irrelevant. No such case has been made. On the contrary, the arguments against national health insurance get more persuasive all the time."

We have to hope that Kilpatrick is right, and, like him, we feel, "The best way to avoid this dreary road (of nationalization) is not to take it at all."

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