

Obamacare Insurers: 'We Have to Break People Away from the Choice Habit'

By Veronique de Rugy
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Critics of Obamacare have argued its heavyhanded government intervention will mean less choice for consumers — now we know it's true, since [we're hearing about it](#) from the *New York Times* rather than “extremists” like the [Cato Institute's Michael Cannon](#). Obamacare may be able to expand insurance, but the insured are going to get fewer choices for to use their insurance, no matter what. Here is a tidbit:

In the midst of all the turmoil in health care these days, one thing is becoming clear: No matter what kind of health plan consumers choose, they will find fewer doctors and hospitals in their network — or pay much more for the privilege of going to any provider they want.

These so-called narrow networks, featuring limited groups of providers, have made a big entrance on the newly created state insurance exchanges, where they are a common feature in many of the plans. While the sizes of the networks vary considerably, many plans now exclude at least some large hospitals or doctors' groups. Smaller networks are also becoming more common in health care coverage offered by employers and in private Medicare Advantage plans.

But hey, consumers, don't worry; insurers are just breaking you out of a bad habit:

“We have to break people away from the choice habit that everyone has,” said Marcus Merz, the chief executive of PreferredOne, an insurer in Golden Valley, Minn., that is owned by two health systems and a physician group. “We're all trying to break away from this fixation on open access and broad networks.”

This article is a perfect illustration of what people get when [the government and private corporate interests](#) (here, the insurance industry) team up to produce such a wide-reaching piece of legislation. You end up with cronyism at its worst, and consumers lose.

To add insult to injury, the article quotes Karen Ignagni, the chief executive of America's Health Insurance Plans, saying that people buying plans seem to favor lower prices over more choices when they're buying plans. That's too bad when one feature of the law is that it hugely *increases* premiums for many plans — many people now have to pay more for the same plan they used to get. Since most people face budget constraints and can't spend much more than they used to pay for their health insurance, they may now have to choose a plan that restricts the doctors they can use — thanks to the government, not market forces.

The bottom line: If you like your plan, you can't always keep it; if you like your doctor, you can't always keep him; and if you like choice, you definitely can't keep that.