

Opinion roundup: Reining in the cost of health care

May 22, 2014

Prices for health care ought to be bundled to prevent the temptation to overcharge through fee-for-service pricing.

The Affordable Care Act did not include that in part due to resistance from Medicare officials in the federal government, wrote Ezekial Emanuel in The Wall Street Journal.

It seems the government's computer system was not set up for it.

Instead, the health care act includes a number of experiments. That won't make a dent in a business that represents about one-sixth of the American economy.

QUOTABLE

From a yearlong Washington Post investigation:

- “Medicare prices are sometimes based on faulty premises, offer perverse incentives for unnecessary care and provide widely varying amounts for equivalent drugs.”
- “Medicare is a wonderful program, but behaviorally, because of the price-fixing, it's a mess.” Tom Scully, Medicare chief during the George W. Bush administration.
- “More than 465,000 spinal fusions were performed in the United States in 2011, according to government data, and some experts say that a portion of them — perhaps as many as half — were performed without good reason.”

So how is a consumer to know when a procedure recommended by a physician is questionable?

One way is to get a second opinion before any surgery. That could be recommended by health insurance companies.

Or there could be more transparency with the consumer told what percentage of these surgeries were considered successful compared to other treatments.

And does the physician have a financial incentive to do the surgery as opposed to a less invasive treatment? In many cases in the fee-for-service system today, the answer is yes.

CONSERVATION WORKS

Energy conservation is the most efficient way to make energy available for business.

Since 1974, the world has avoided using energy at a rate equivalent to two-thirds of annual consumption.

The market for smart appliances is doubling each year, reports the Economist.

GOVERNMENT WASTE

The federal government has 47 federal training programs, many overlap and few work, reports the Cato institute.

The government would be better off making grants to community colleges that vary based on results.

POWER OF VACCINATIONS

We take for granted that many diseases, especially those connected with childhood, have disappeared.

A total of 103 million cases of polio, measles, rubella, mumps, hepatitis A, diphtheria and pertussis have been prevented by vaccinations since 1924, reports Reason magazine..

Rubella, which can cause deafness and other symptoms, affected 2,160 infants in 1965. In 2006, that number was one.

PROGRESS SINCE BENGHAZI

In all the coverage of the deaths of four Americans in Libya in 2012, the tragedy has produced an increase in security for U.S. diplomatic missions worldwide.

According to a report from the House Committee on Armed Services, there was no Marine security guard detachment in Benghazi on Sept. 11, 2012. By the end of 2014, 35 U.S. diplomatic facilities will receive these units. Also the size of existing detachments in high-threat, high-risk post is being increased.

FIGHTING FRAUD

The Sunshine State seems to attract fraud artists. Here are some tips from the state's chief financial officer:

- Check out something that sounds too good to be true. Don't be rushed. If it's legitimate, the offer still will be there in a day or two. It's easier to check it out than to get your money back.

- Don't pay upfront fees to groups you don't know. Remember that fraudsters like to use popular groups to hide behind names that sound like they're representing veterans or police officers. Ask a caller to mail you information, so you can study it and check it out.
- Only buy insurance from licensed agents and companies.
- Don't provide personal or confidential information by email, phone or text to someone you don't know or trust. Once your identity is stolen it can take months to repair the harm.

JTA: DID YOU KNOW?

When tolls were removed after a vote in 1989, they were replaced with a half-cent sales tax.

That revenue has been used to invest in roadways.

"The vast majority of the roads constructed or improved by JTA are state roads or part of the National Highway System," JTA said in a report to the City Council's task force on consolidation.

JTA has built the following state roads:

- J. Turner Butler Boulevard.
- Wonderwood Connector.
- Much of the interstate highway system in Jacksonville, including the Fuller Warren Bridge and the Dames Point bridge.

The major benefit of paying for highways early is that Jacksonville has one of the best road systems in the state.

The drawback is that the city has not received enough in return from the state, continually begging the state to support the Mayport ferry, an essential link to a state road, A1A.

JEA: DID YOU KNOW?

When JEA took over the city's water and service system in 1997, it no longer was the Jacksonville Electric Authority. JEA would do.

Not only did JEA shape up a troubled water and sewer system, it invested about \$2 billion in upgrades.

And the city received a higher contribution in return.

That is the benefit of an independent authority.

