

OTHER OPINION

HEALTH INSURERS SHOULD
FINANCE RESEARCH

My 14-year-old son was diagnosed with severe cardiomyopathy in September 1999.

The only remedy available in the United States was a heart transplant, which requires a lifelong regimen of very expensive patented

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anti-rejection drugs.

However, I discovered that an acclaimed cardiologist (known mostly outside this country due to the arrogance of American physicians) was administering a protocol of three unpatentable medications: a sucrose solution, insulin and potassium.

In tests on animals, then in humans with double-blind studies, the cardiologist was having an 80 percent success rate. He has been using the procedure in Mexico City for about three years.

My son's chances with a dual transplant, heart and lung, were 1 percent to 2 percent. The dual transplant became necessary because of complications, but he was still not out of the realm of recovery with this simple three-drug procedure.

However, this procedure is not performed in this country because it's anyone's guess who will pay for the approval research. Research performed in other countries, especially those deemed "Third World," has a snowball's chance in hell of getting recognized here.

Therefore, those with a vested interest in seeing that a patient's health care results in the improvement of the patient's well-being — the health insurance and health care industries — must step forward with the research dollars.

Health insurance companies could improve their own finances while offering true health care by funding research for every potential remedy, regardless of whether it results in a patented drug.

Pharmaceutical companies are the primary, and many times the only, driving force that determines the direction and scope of medical research in this country, especially in universities and government labs. This research is geared solely toward the development of patent-protected drugs that benefit the companies, not the care or well-being of the patients.



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Many times the federal government is involved in fundamental medical research. But that research is triggered by grant proposals submitted by scientists and physicians in the commercial sector — that is, pharmaceutical companies looking for financial support and collaborative research with the government under the guise of patient welfare.

This funded research follows the lead and advice of physicians, with the caveat that the result of the research (patented drugs) belongs in large part (or in toto) to the pharmaceutical company involved.

And once the drugs are patented, the drug companies relentlessly bombard the physicians with information about the new drug to influence their medical decisions in its utilization.

These drugs are designed almost exclusively to treat the symptoms rather than the underlying illness.

Certainly, the health care community can argue that the sedentary lifestyle of most Americans, along with their less-than-healthy eating habits, are major contributors to many of the illnesses that plague people today.

However, there are many specific and varied remedies and cures that exist in the homeopathic community that would require federal Food and Drug Administration studies to prove their efficacy. Many of these remedies would pass the rigorous scientific double-blind studies that are required for FDA approval, thus allowing lawsuit-fearing physicians the ability to use these remedies in their patient care.

But who is going to pay for these studies if there is no "pot of gold" — that is, no exorbitant profits to be found at the end of the study?

Obviously there is no pharmaceutical company that will undertake this unprofitable task. Therefore, the health insurance companies, those who have the most to lose through unperformed research, must come to the forefront and finance these studies to look out for the welfare of their client-patients.

Numerous examples can be given of the remedies that are out there today. But that would lead to controversy over the examples cited, and the basic premise of the argument would be lost: Health insurance providers should get into the health care research business.

My son was lost because of the treatment he received from myopic, closed-minded physicians influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. Tragedies like this can be avoided if health insurers come to bat for the many people they serve.

It makes financial sense for health insurance companies to pick up the slack in research dollars. However, they must not follow the lead of the pharmaceutical companies and expect only high-profit patented drugs from their research.

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