

The National Health Care System

David Patrick McDonnell

I had the chance to experience the National Health Care Service while vacationing in Europe back in 1991. For many years I got bad stomach aches in my teens and twenties. I was doubled over in agony but the doctors could never tell me what was causing them. Many times my father had to drive me to the hospital during the early hours of the morning. If I was given a shot of Demerol and fell asleep for awhile, the pain subsided and I would feel much better. These aches caused me to miss time from school, work, and band practice.

While on vacation in Ireland, I traveled to County Cork where my dad was born. On the first day there I did a lot of walking, and by late afternoon I could feel an ache coming on. It worsened as the evening progressed, and I spent the whole night doubled over in pain.

The next day I took a taxi to the hospital. I had to fill out some forms and explain that I was an American tourist. I also had to get blood work done. Then the surgeon pressed down on the lower right side of my abdomen and I nearly went through the roof! He told me my appendix would have to be removed. This was the cause of all my

aches. Once it was removed, I never got stomach aches as intense as that again.

After I returned home, I was billed in Irish pounds, the equivalent of \$600.

I was told that an appendectomy in the United States would have cost \$4000!

If you get sick in Europe, you do not have to worry about the cost of health care because the government covers you. Health care is funded by tax revenue and regulated by the legislature. The United States is the only wealthy, industrialized nation that does not provide universal health care for all citizens. We can land a man on the moon and spend billions of dollars for a war, but if you get sick and do not have proper health coverage you can go broke overnight. I am proud to be an American and love America but we need to get our priorities straight.

Health insurance costs are rising faster than wages or inflation. In 2001, half of all people filing for bankruptcy in the United States did so due to medical expenses. The European system is not perfect. Sometimes patients must wait for a period of six months or more for surgeries. However, no one is left without coverage as is so common in the United States.



Take it Further

Write about an experience you had with health insurance in this country or another one. Compare your story with others in the your class.

Distinguish between fact and opinion. Circle three facts and underline three opinions in McDonnell's essay. Compare your choices with others in the class.

Write a letter to the author. Tell him which parts of his article you agree with or disagree with. Explain.

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David Patrick McDonnell is a student at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA.