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If President Obama Were a Nurse

Healthcare reform would have focused on patient needs, not corporate greed

IMAGINE HOW IT ALL could have been different. Imagine if those redesigning our healthcare system were more like you. Imagine if President Obama were a nurse.

If President Obama were a nurse, he would start with an assessment of the patient (the healthcare system in this case) and a care plan intended to bring about healing and recovery—not by offering the insurance and drug industries sweeping concessions to enhance their profits and buy their support.

Or the compromised policy wonk “experts” from corporate-funded think tanks more interested in protecting the status quo than proposing real therapies.

If the president were a nurse, his focus would have been the desired outcome, a more humane healthcare system based on patient need and eliminating all the barriers to optimal care, not on appeasing everyone invited into the room.

The president would start by listening to the hands-on nurses and other direct caregivers, to the patients and their families, to those who have no more patience for fighting with the claims adjusters and drug formularies and hospital managers.

He would know that you don’t treat cancer with an aspirin because aspirin is easier to get. That if you tell patients you are going to get medication for their pain, you don’t come back with just a glass of water.

If President Obama were a nurse, he would understand that everyone should have access to high-quality healthcare when they need it and where they need it, care not based on ability to pay, or whether you have met your annual deductible or co-payment.

He would know that no one should face bankruptcy because of medical bills, or have to choose between taking their child to the doctor or paying for their rent or mortgage, or skipping needed medical visits or cutting their prescription medications in half.

And, he would never settle for a piece-

meal, substandard plan that does so little to protect those patients and families.

If the president were a nurse, he would instinctively know that health insurance is not healthcare. He would not have endorsed “reform” predicated on forcing every American to buy expensive and wasteful private insurance, especially with no controls on what the insurers can charge or adequate recourse for when they deny medical treatment.

He would lead on healthcare not by seeking to lower the expectations of those favoring comprehensive reform, and barring them from the debate while giving handout after handout to the healthcare industry, free market fundamentalists, and all their advocates in Congress.

He would lead by standing up to the insurers and the drug companies and all the politicians they fund who believe healthcare is a privilege, not a right. He would rally and inspire the public to support the reform, such as expanding Medicare to cover everyone, that replaces the cruel and dysfunctional system with one based on caring and compassion.

If the president were a nurse, he would praise the examples of Canada, and France, and Taiwan, and Great Britain, and all those countries that don’t siphon off 30 cents of every healthcare dollar for paperwork and profit, where access to care is based on individual need, not on the size of your bank account.

He would not enable the attacks by Fox

News, the Tea Party, and rightwing politicians on “government” healthcare by defending the role of government in assuring a social safety net that covers everyone.

He would explain that what America stands for is justice and fairness, not greed and a multi-tiered healthcare system. That every patient matters equally, and the poor and powerless are entitled to the same level of care as the rich and well connected.

If the president were a nurse, he would proudly proclaim the benefits of a publicly financed, more humane healthcare system that also benefits everyone by creating millions of jobs through the delivery, not the denial, of care.

He would explain it is better to spend our nation’s resources on healing and education than on warfare and building weapons, that how it cares for those most in need is the true measure of a nation’s greatness.

If President Obama were a nurse, he would probably go home from work each night and cry over what he saw that day. And he would vow, anew, each night to reach out to America and look for ways to organize and build a better and more humane nation. And, he would know he would have no choice but to stand up and fight head on the big corporations who are bleeding our nation dry for all of us. ■

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A year after healthcare reform, how are we doing?

- 50.7 million Americans are uninsured.
- Blue Shield raised individual premiums by up to 59 percent in California. Family health insurance premiums nationally more than doubled between 1999 and 2009, far outpacing workers’ earnings and inflation.
- Workers pay 47 percent more now than in 2005 for coverage they get through jobs. Since 1987 the number of Californians covered by insurance provided through an employer fell from 65 to 52 percent.
- California’s seven largest insurers denied more than one-fourth of all claims last year.
- Nurses suffer more back injuries than other occupations, yet the administration withdrew a rule, first eliminated by the Bush administration, to require employers to report musculoskeletal injuries.

Tell us what YOU think at nationalnursesunited.org/obama.