

## **As I See It: Samaritan expands, while health care crashes**

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I was uneasy with the recent three-page story in the Mid-Valley Sunday edition detailing the phenomenal business success of Samaritan Health Services.

I appreciate that Samaritan care providers have made an important difference in the lives of several people I know, but when one of the largest problems of health care today is the increasing cost, Samaritan seems a little too delighted with the empire expansion which ever-increasing revenue has made possible.

I would rejoice in its economic expansion more if it wasn't helping to escalate the cost of a basic human need.

Health care isn't like the other traditional three basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing. When we need to, we can eat noodles and beans for a very small fraction of the cost of sirloin. We can stay warm in used clothing for almost no cost at all. We can live in less expensive housing or move in with friends. But health care cannot be significantly or morally economized by society.

When we are collectively paying far more for health care than any other industrialized nation and getting less for our money than any of them, when everyone in America could have a free house to live in for far less than we are spending on health care, the problem clearly isn't that we are being miserly or uncaring. And though the widening wealth and income disparity is not helping the health care cost crisis, the cost crisis has gotten far too big to solve by narrowing that disparity. Bill Gates' \$74 billion fortune would pay for only eight days of our \$3.4 trillion dollar national health care cost.

Samaritan Health Services has proven itself to have exceptional business skills. I just wish it would see health care a little less like a business opportunity. By comparison, consider how our public K-12 school systems provide a similar public service without a business revenue model.

Our K-12 schools:

- Don't waste up to a third of their budgets figuring out how to charge slow learners more than fast learners.
- Don't ask teachers to keep track of how much time they spend with each student and then to submit paperwork throughout the day for reimbursement based on which of thousands of kinds of student-teacher interaction took place.

- Don't have to spend 45 minutes after school on hold trying to figure out why the reimbursement check for evaluating Zach's spelling test last week wasn't received.
- Don't have a two-week preapproval process before a student can check out a library book.
- Don't expect teachers to set their income based on the number of special tests or tutoring programs they can sell.
- Do expect that the people they serve might want to help decide whether the best way to use limited funds is through unbounded expansion of facilities.
- Do operate with public input.
- Do have laws against peddling drugs within 1,000 feet of a school.