



How Sick is the American Healthcare System?

Reflections on Michael Moore's film *Sicko*.

by Dr. Lena Kian, ND

In an effort to diagnose the state of America's healthcare system, Academy Award-winning director and producer Michael Moore turned his camera onto the medical juggernaut for his newest film *Sicko*.

From the start, Moore wisely establishes that this movie is not necessarily about the 50 million Americans who are uninsured. He is examining the plight of the 250 million Americans who do have health insurance assuming it will secure necessary medical care. Moore presents case after case of such individuals desperately seeking care for their health conditions, only to become victimized by the side effects of the profit-motivated insurance and pharmaceutical companies.

Moore visits Canada, France, England and Cuba, which have structured systems of state-sponsored universal health care (where even he is surprised to find that both patients and doctors report satisfaction with their country's healthcare system). Patients in the U.S. are often denied coverage due to preexisting medical conditions. In other countries

a country with such wealth, resources and intelligence have an embarrassingly low ranking when it comes to providing healthcare? (According to the World Health Organization's 2000 ranking of healthcare systems, the U.S. is placed at number 37.) When legislators are too often bought off by big pharmacy, HMOs and insurance companies, where can citizens turn to demand better healthcare? Michael Moore partly answers that question by interviewing Americans who chose to move to other countries. However, for those residing in the United States, the solution may not be as simple as adopting a socialized system of medicine.

Even those with satisfactory insurance coverage find that the Western system of Biomedicine is not always equipped to heal them, especially when it comes to chronic conditions. Most often it will suppress or at best make their symptom(s) manageable with pharmaceutical drugs. Most medical doctors in the U.S. have limited therapeutic range and may only offer drugs and/or surgery to their patients. To this day, doctors receive little or

better quality of life. As Michael Moore mentions, they have a better lifestyle, have shorter work weeks, take more vacations and even utilize preventative medicine in their approach to health care.

Over the last 30 years, there has been a significant rise in consumer demand for safe, effective and cost-effective natural healthcare, including

Naturopathic Medicine, Homeopathy, Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda. Consumers realize that while drugs and surgery can be life-saving in the appropriate circumstances, they are not always the miracle cures promised. Consequently people are turning to more integrative and healing approaches, even paying out of pocket since

such services are sometimes not covered by insurance companies. Given the growing number of people suffering from chronic conditions such as diabetes, obesity, depression, cardiovascular disease and autoimmune conditions, it is time that we integrate natural therapies into mainstream medicine. Perhaps this will even make insurance companies realize that natural and preventative medicine can be a considerable and ethical approach to reducing healthcare costs. With *Sicko* giving us a taste of the illness of the healthcare system, and the growing consumer demand for better quality and more natural healthcare, let's start a revolution and create a new paradigm.

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such as France, preexisting conditions would place them on the priority list for healthcare along with extra preventive care.

Issues raised here may not come as a surprise to many frustrated patients and healthcare workers, but *Sicko* is the first widely distributed film presenting the seriousness of the current American healthcare crisis. How can

no training in nutrition and other healing practices during medical school, whereas it was Hippocrates, the father of medicine, who said, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." Just as we need to change our profit-making mentality, we need to change our approach to health and medicine. This is perhaps another reason French people have a



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