Give Veterans Freedom of Choice in Health Care

By Roy Minet (Rev. 08/13/14)

Obviously, the appalling treatment by the VA that our veterans have been forced to live with (and sometimes die from) needs to be fixed as quickly as possible. No doubt, there will be the usual spate of investigations and indignant politicians lining up to publicly state their outrage. A few heads will roll. Perhaps some new regulations or laws will be piled onto the already huge stack that no one fully comprehends. Maybe even my personal "favorite," a new oversight commission, will be created. Of course, the VA will undoubtedly need additional funding to fix things. We will be assured that nothing like that can ever happen again, and everyone will return to their normal state of ignoring what is going on.

Doesn't this seem all too familiar? It's the kneejerk routine we go through when a major section of our colossal bureaucracy does something exceptionally bad and gains national attention. How many times does that have to happen before we realize that another layer of band aids is neither a good nor a lasting fix? Major surgery is required.

The fundamental cause of the VA problems (and there are many other similar examples) is an improper use of government force (laws and regulations). As eloquently explained in our Declaration of Independence, the only proper purpose of a government is to protect and secure individual rights to life, liberty and property. Instead of protecting veterans' liberty (and sometimes even their lives), government has eliminated veterans' freedom to choose their health care provider and has forced them to use only the VA. Government has also infringed upon the freedom healthcare providers should have to offer their services to veterans.

The VA is a monopoly. Monopolies are not forced by competition to provide the best possible service at the lowest cost since their customers are locked in. Except in extreme cases such as we are currently witnessing with the VA, it is difficult even to tell how well monopolies are functioning since there are no competitors with which to compare them.

By contrast, the free market does the best job of efficiently providing many thousands of goods and services with many variations and choices. It is a completely voluntary system, needing no force or coercion to perform its magic. Problems are fixed automatically, quickly and locally (without bloviating politicians). Suppliers who do not provide what customers want at a good price must either improve or go out of business.

Who would think that setting up a big bureaucracy and a whole parallel set of hospitals as a monopoly would be a good or efficient way to serve veterans' health care needs? Even if veterans have some unique needs, surely those capabilities could easily be added by the existing health care system.

If someone has become seriously disabled while defending our country, we clearly are obligated to care for them thereafter. If we also wish to grant health care benefits to other veterans, that very well may be a reasonable choice. Surely, it is possible to deliver the benefit in a much simpler way that would be of greater value to veterans. One possibility is just to cut a check for the median cost of all insurance policies that offer coverage commensurate with the level of disability incurred in the line of duty. Veterans would then have total control: buy any level of insurance, pay for care directly, or any of the many options the free market offers.

The VA could then disappear. It's a fairly safe bet that the total of all checks issued would be less than the VA budget, so taxpayers also would likely come out ahead. But that's not the main point. Let's solve the problems the right way and permanently with a VA-ectomy. Let's not deny our veterans the freedom of choice that the rest of us have. Let's not deny them the benefits the free market system can provide.

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