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UNIVERSITY
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SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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January 24, 1994

Cory Farley
Reno Gazette-Journal
P.O. Box 22000
Reno, NV 89520-2000

Dear Mr. Farley:

You are right: "It's the system", not physicians, that needs reform. Nevada physicians are among the best educated, trained and caring professionals in the country, and provide their patients with excellent medical care. But many physicians agree that it's long past "the time to face the medicine."

Despite some of the "straw men" that get worked into the debate about health care reform, the School of Medicine believes that the need of society for universal access to quality health care and the desire of most physicians to provide that care are fully compatible and mutually beneficial.

In a recent AMA survey, the majority of those physicians responding supported many key elements of President Clinton's plan and believe his health care reform package will, for the first time in our history, ensure access to quality health care for all Americans. Specifically, physicians support:

- 1) A comprehensive benefits package
- 2) Health coverage for all citizens with no denial or loss of coverage for any reason
- 3) Free access to and choice from among several health plans
- 4) Free choice of physician
- 5) Employer mandate with limits on growth of health insurance premiums.

At the University of Nevada School of Medicine, we support these, and many other aspects of the Clinton Plan, and understand that to accomplish meaningful reform there must be fundamental changes in the way future physicians are selected, educated and trained.

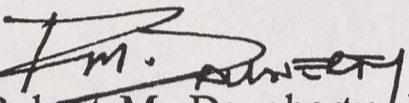
As we celebrate our 25th Anniversary, we are proud of the progress we've made toward fulfilling the original mission of the School to provide primary care physicians for Nevada. To date 40% of our graduates have entered a primary care specialty - one of the highest rates in the country. But we can do better!!

To this end we have embarked on an ambitious program of curriculum reform emphasizing primary care in all of our programs so that by the year 2003 (ten short years), 55 to 60% of our graduates (both here in Nevada and nationally) will be practicing primary care. This will go a long way to insuring that "every pregnant woman (has) prenatal care, every child (is) vaccinated and every sick person (gets) medicine when he or she needs it."

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But it must be understood that this significant shift of the proportion of physicians into "primary care" will not diminish society's future need for highly trained and skilled specialists and subspecialists or the need to continue to advance the frontiers of medicine through quality research. Additionally, we would oppose any arbitrary quotas which would restrict future physician's free choice to pursue, within reasonable limits, their chosen specialty. We, too, want your "doctor(s) to be happy."

Sincerely,


Robert M. Daugherty, Jr., M.D., Ph.D.
Dean



CORY FARLEY

OK, doctors, it's time to face the medicine

Look, I know we've had our differences. But can we agree that doctors are not enthusiastic about health care reform?

Certainly the doctors I've discussed it with aren't. Since it began to look like President Clinton actually might do something on the issue, they've talked about it whenever the occasion arose. Sometimes, if the occasion doesn't arise, they'll jerk it, yawning and rubbing its eyes, to its feet. And they're not happy.

That concerns me. These people are all — they are mostly, I have doubts about one or two — dedicated to their patients. If they object to Clinton's plan, I have to listen.

But when I listen, all I hear are complaints.

They rail against government intervention. They say they won't be able to practice medicine as they should. They worry about what will happen to their patients.

But nobody has jumped up and said, "Here's what we should do instead."

I don't know enough about their jobs to separate truth from hysteria. Change is rarely as bad as those affected expect it to be. But they insist that under Clinton's plan, some people won't get the care they need.

On the other hand, a lot of people don't get the care they need now. And my impression is that many physicians either don't know that or don't understand why it's true.

There is some "Let 'em eat cake" out there in Doctorland, and I suspect some "Let 'em starve" as well.

I have personally heard a physician say that she doesn't see why people come to her if they can't pay her bill. My explanation — "Because they're sick" — didn't seem to placate her.

I think I've made progress. For instance, I've rebutted the charge that "the liberals" rushed into health care reform, while Republicans would have taken time to come up with a better solution.

The Republicans, I try not to scream, took 12 years and never even acknowledged the problem. Now, suddenly, they say they have a fix.

Sure they do. Sure they would have if Clinton hadn't put their butts on a brazier. Sure Santa will bring you a Lexus, too.

It's harder to win them over on the monetary issue.

I want my doctor to be happy, relaxed and well-nourished. Frankly, though, I don't care if he has to spend Christmas in Aspen instead of Gstaad.

Moreover, I'm not convinced solutions to the medical crisis have to come from medical people. Medical people, plus the egregious health insurance companies, got us into this mess. Should we trust them to lead us out?

But maybe they can. So here's the deal: If you're a medical person unhappy with the Clinton plan, prescribe a better one.

Be as general or as detailed as you like. I won't print your name if you ask me not to, but I do have rules:

- No whining about your overhead or your investment in education. Nobody made you go to medical school.

- Pay yourself decently. \$125,000 a year in 1993 money sounds adequate to me. It's five times the average person's income. If you think you can't live on it, maybe that's part of the problem.

- Provide essential care for essentially everybody.

You can blow off heart transplants for 83-year-old men if you like. But every pregnant woman should have prenatal care, every child should be vaccinated and every sick person should get medicine when he or she needs it.

- Pay for it all in some fairer way than that which Clinton proposes.

OK, Docs. Your move.

Cory Farley is a Gazette-Journal columnist. His column appears Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

CORY

FARLEY

Lots of heat, few answers on health care

We have put our finger, as I knew we would if I appealed to those directly involved, on the real problem this nation faces with medicine.

It is that poorly informed people who happen to be ill somehow think they have health care coming to them.

Do you see the simple genius of it? If sick people who have no money and no insurance would either get well on their own or die without a lot of headline-making fuss, we never would have gotten into this mess.

This is not the opinion of all doctors. But it is the opinion of a person whose last name is Parker, first name unknown to me because I tore up his letter and threw it away in a snit.

This Parker — I don't know if he's a physician, a relative or just a Republican — writes on expensive stationery with a tasteful monogram. About 40-pound bond, with a high rag content.

On it, he claimed to have read last week's column asking medical people for alternatives to President Clinton's health care plan, which many of them despise. He didn't read it carefully enough to learn to spell my name, but he did lend credence to one of my concerns, that "there is a lot of 'Let 'em eat cake' out there in Doctorland."

The truth, he said — my wording is inexact, because the janitor has hauled the trash away — is that "people don't deserve health care any more than they deserve shoes or newspapers."

This was "supported" by some boilerplate about socialism, in Parker's mind apparently a condition so deplorable that uninsured Americans would be better off dying than living with it.

There were other comments I would love to pass along, but can't because the letter's gone. If Mr. Parker feels the shrift I've given him is unfairly abbreviated, and has a copy, I'd be happy to print more. Pretty soon we'd have doctors marching on Washington demanding national health care, just so nobody would mistake them for him.

■ ■ ■
The opinions of one man should not be taken as the opinions of a group, and I've had reasonable proposals from physicians. Some even believe Clinton's plan is necessary.

As is usually the case, the invective came first in a rush. The thoughtful letters are still trickling in. To give them more time, I'll save those until I get back from vacation. For now, here are some early quotes:

You cite \$125,000 as an adequate salary. Can you even imagine what it's like to lead a doctor's life on that sum?
— Carson City physician.

It is apparent that you are resentful of most successful people. — Anesthesiologist.

Now there's a surgical cut to the heart of the matter.

You obviously know nothing of the business of medicine...
— Unsigned.

True. That's what I said. That's why I asked for expert opinion.

Keep it up. It's good to see the doctors get what we've been getting. — Reno attorney.

Somehow I've gone horribly wrong here...

God help you if you ever need medical care. — Unsigned.

This was a repeated theme, and I want to catch it early: My family's used a lot of medical care in this town, and we've been happy with every second of it. Serious Big-City Doctors have told us they're impressed with the local talent, and sent us home with no qualms about what we'll get here.

It's the system that sucks. Let's keep that straight.

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