

Letter from America

Presidential Election Promises.

Prof Brian Edwards

Now that Donald Trump looks certain to be the Republican candidate for the presidential elections in the USA we need understand his health policies a bit better. He believes in applying free market principles to health care and will, if elected, repeal the Obamacare reforms.

The Affordable Care Act or Obamacare became law in 2010 and was designed to bring down health insurance costs. The law requires insurance companies to cover all applicants within a defined geographical area and offer the same rates regardless of pre-existing conditions or sex. All citizens who are not covered by their employer have to take out insurance or face a penalty. Low income families can claim help from their State. Each State is required to operate a Health Insurance Exchange where policies can be compared and purchased with a government subsidy if the individual is entitled to one. Access to Medicaid the traditional safety net for the poor was slightly widened.

No person should in Trump's view be required to buy health insurance unless he or she wants to. He would however open up the health insurance market by modifying the law

that inhibits the sale of health insurance across state lines. Full competition will he claims bring down insurance costs.

Individuals who take out health insurance would be allowed to fully deduct their payments from their tax returns. Payments into Health Savings Accounts would be tax free and allowed to accumulate. These accounts would also be exempt from death duty and form part of an individuals estate and used by any family member without penalty. Medicaid would remain the partial safety net for those who could not afford insurance. It would however be block granted to individual States rather than operated on a federal basis.

Price transparency would become mandatory for all healthcare providers in order to facilitate patient choice. The pharmaceutical market would be reformed by the removal of barriers to any supplier of safe and dependable drugs including those from overseas manufacturers.

Reducing the number of migrants to the USA would, he claims, save \$11 billion a year in healthcare costs.

Mental health programmes and institutions would be the subject of radical reform and improvement.

Hilary Clinton on the other hand will defend and expand the Affordable Care Act [Obamacare] and make premiums more affordable. She will offer tax credits of upto \$5000 per family. Her target is that families who buy their health insurance via the Affordable Care Act exchanges should never be required to pay more than 8.5% of their income on premiums. She would incentivise States to expand the national Medicaid programme and invest in an aggressive enrolment campaign. She claims that half of the 30 million uninsured citizens could enrol

in a scheme that offered them virtually free Medicaid coverage. She would ignore immigration status in decisions about enrolling immigrant families in Affordable Health Care insurance programmes. She would also work with those State Governors who wanted to introduce a “public option” to their health care systems. She is keen on telemedicine in rural areas and would seek to reduce drug costs. Ensuring that women have access to reproductive health care would be a priority.

The Clinton package is a continuation and development of the Obama reforms and more sophisticated than those being promoted by Trump. On the other hand Trump’s package is sharp, clear and attractive to those whose votes he needs to win the election.

edwards@sheffield.msn.com