

## Health care consumers must be treated equally

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For Post-Crescent Media



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My father, Dr. Marv Kagen, died last fall after practicing dermatology for 60 years. Before he passed, I asked him what he enjoyed most about practicing medicine.

“That’s easy,” he said. “Every day, I cared for the richest and poorest people in town and I treated everyone equally at the same price. Can you do that?”

While serving in the House of Representatives, I worked hard to enact my father’s common-sense idea of equality in health care. I pushed hard for transparent medical prices, but powerful lobbyists pushed back even harder to block them. As a result, large corporate-run clinics and “non-profit” hospitals still hide the lowest prices they accept as payment in full, and we still have no idea what the best price might be for essential health care services.

I’m proud, however, to have made tremendous progress. Working with other Democrats, I led the battle to make health care a civil right. You now own this fundamental human right, and it’s yours as long as you can keep it.

I fought hard to end discrimination against all citizens with pre-existing medical conditions — and won. This October, insurance companies will sell standardized plans in which being a woman is not a pre-existing condition.

In other words, if you’re a citizen, you’re in. That’s a really big deal.

Most importantly, no longer will a family go broke and lose their home just because a loved one becomes ill or has a serious accident.

Now, it’s time we take the next step together and establish true equality in our health care delivery system. Don’t you believe everyone should pay the same price for the same service?

Together, we will make this happen. And here’s how.

Let's enact laws at the local level to enable everyone to see the lowest prices accepted as payment in full for all health care products and services. If local governments fail to help, we must publically shame clinic administrators and hospital executives who refuse to disclose all their prices.

Treating every citizen equally must become the norm, not the exception.

Last month, I proposed this idea to the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, and it accepted it into its platform as follows:

"Whereas, all citizens must be free, at all times, to choose their own health insurance plans, doctors, pharmacies and hospitals, and free to seek care from any willing provider who accepts the terms of their insurance coverage; and,

"Whereas, all prices for all health care products and services offered to the public must always be openly disclosed, including on the Internet, such that the lowest prices accepted as payment in full are always transparent;

"Therefore, resolved, every health care facility must treat patients equally, and at the same price for the same service or product."

Imagine being able to search online for the best care at the best price, as we do today for automobiles and restaurants.

Let's demand equality in health care by creating locally competitive medical marketplaces in which people are always free to choose their doctors and pharmacies, and see the lowest prices accepted as payment in full.

Let's finish what we started and guarantee everyone, rich or poor, receives the best care at the best price.

My father was right. Every patient must be treated equally, and at the same price. He didn't live to see this happen, but working together, we will.

<http://www.postcrescent.com/article/20130806/APC06/308060133/Steve-Kagen-Treat-health-care-consumers-equally-video-column->



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