

Healthcare as a Privilege in the United States

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According to the United Nations, the definition of human rights is “rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status”. One of these rights that should be “inherent to all”, is health. So in sequence, to aid in the maintenance of health, healthcare should also be considered a right. However, in the United States, health has become a privilege rather than a right.

In the United States many factors determine the level of healthcare available for an individual. Some of these factors include economic status, education level, where you live, and race. In the TED Talk by Majora Carter, she talks about some of these factors and how it affects their health. When talking about her neighborhood she explains that “Fifty percent of our residents live at or below the poverty line; 25 percent of us are unemployed” (Carter, 2006). She continues to mention how one's economic status has punished those who are less fortunate or privileged. As a black woman she talks about her upbringing and how statistically speaking, her neighborhood was more at risk for health complications like asthma and obesity. “As a black person in America, I am twice as likely as a white person to live in an area where air pollution poses the greatest risk to my health. I am five times more likely to live within walking distance of a power plant or chemical facility” (Carter, 2006). She explains that the asthma hospitalization rate in her community is seven times higher than that of the national average because of the pollution they cannot escape in these poverty stricken neighborhoods. Neighborhoods like Majora Carter’s who have to live in conditions that can cause countless complications are also the ones who have less access to the healthcare they need to overcome these circumstances. These conditions are holding communities back from receiving the healthcare they need to pursue the basic rights of life, liberty, and happiness.

In the TED Talk by David Ansell “Inequality Kills”, he shares his experience as a doctor in the heart of Chicago watching “tens of thousands of Americans die too soon” (Ansell, 2018). He mentioned how he mostly worked with hospitals in poor black communities. In these communities he would struggle alongside his patients to try to provide the amount of care they needed while the white wealthy neighborhood right next door had all the means to save these patients but was just out of budget. He expressed that none of the patients he had that needed a life saving organ transplant ever received one even though their families were willing to donate. However, he would watch individuals in the predominately white private hospital survive from the donations from his own patients (Ansell, 2018). He had to watch countless patients lose their right of life just because they didn’t have the right insurance card. Apart from the impact that poverty has on attainable healthcare, David Ansell also talks about how “Racism is a key driver for premature fatality” (Ansell, 2018). This is an important aspect to talk about because the fight of racism has been ongoing for centuries. It is stated in our very Declaration of Independence “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” . This document, which is the foundation of this nation, was written in 1776, yet in the year 2022 the country still does not uphold these standards. By denying individuals rights solely on the color of their skin is going against what this nation stands for. This discrimination allows privileges such as healthcare to continue to strip the rights of those who are less fortunate.

When discussing healthcare in the United States, health insurance is more than often brought up. Health insurance has an immense impact on the quantity and quality of care an individual can receive. The kind of insurance you have is based on how much you can afford to pay for insurance. For that reason, many individuals are left with less than the bare minimum when it comes to care simply because they cannot afford better. Even if someone is fortunate

enough to be able to afford the best insurance, they are still left with the potential to pay thousands of dollars in copays. In an article by Mary Gerisch, she mentions her fight with insurance companies when going through cancer treatments with her wife. She included that although they were fortunate their insurance got them through the first round, when the cancer returned and spread they were left waiting on their insurance company to choose who they got their treatment through. This waiting ultimately led to the death of her wife. Unfortunately Mary's story is only one of far too many. An unreasonable amount of people and populations are left to sit and wait for the okay from their insurance companies when treatment is right at their fingertips. This directly impacts their culture of health and denies them rights that the founders set in stone on paper. The Second Bill of Rights, proposed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, includes "The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health". The structure of the United States healthcare system is denying the basic rights of their people.

When looking at the foundations of this country, the Declaration of Independence specifically states "That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". While discussing healthcare and whether it should be a right or a privilege we should look back to what the founders wanted for its citizens. There is a snowball effect when thinking of the impact that the healthcare system has on one's life and rights. Healthcare is directly related to and dictates an individual's health. This health directly influences the quality and longevity of their life, which according to the Declaration of Independence, is a basic right. One's health also influences their right to the pursuit of happiness.

Although healthcare in the United States is necessary to obtain the basic rights set by the founding fathers, it has grown to be a privilege. Healthcare is an essential component needed to

attain good health, which will improve the overall quality of one's life. There are many factors that prevent citizens of the United States from obtaining this right of health. There is not one person more deserving of health than another, therefore, our healthcare system should no longer be a privilege. This nation has failed and denied the basic rights of health to far too many of its people. It is our duty to give back these rights starting by improving the healthcare system.

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