

The Future of HealthCare in America: A Panel Discussion at the Graduate Center

Q&A from the Audience

Question: What are the important features of a successful path to single-payer?

A. Roy argued that the Bernie plan would increase federal spending by \$28 trillion over the next 10 years, translating to a 55% rise in the federal government budget. It does not have guidelines on how to fund it. *J. Gruber* pointed out that three hurdles have to be overcome: the 80% rule must be satisfied; the \$800 billion a year private health insurance industry will resist it; and Americans need to be convinced that currently they are paying a hidden tax and instead, they will have to pay an explicit tax. Employers pay lower wages in return for health insurance. A single payer will replace that with an explicit tax. *P. Krugman* replied that people will be allowed to buy into Medicare and over time more people would gravitate to it. But he recognized that this doesn't solve the problem of insurance companies and this is why there was no public option in ACA. *A. Roy* wondered why there is a market-based system for goods in the economy, which is why prices are declining with technology, but not one for health care. Such a system, he argued, would allow covering the poor and the sick through taxes and spending and also leave room for innovation.

Question: Is health care a right?

A. Roy argued that although he supports universal coverage, he believes that individuals should have the right to choose one's own doctor, the health care arrangement. *P. Krugman* responded that we are getting to a consensus that the American people believe everybody should have basic standard of health care. *D. Singiser* agreed that such rights should be universal and not dependent on the state, race, and gender, which is still not the case. *J. Gruber* asked what does that right mean? Bernie's plan is too generous and doesn't ask questions such as: will it include prescription drugs? Chiropractors? What will be maternity coverage for dependents? He concluded that until we answer these details we cannot answer what it means for health care to be a right.

Question: How can the public have an opinion when bills are very opaque?

This was a difficult question to answer. The panelists agreed that the administration did not give any time to scrutinize the last bill. Even though Obamacare has been the law for seven years public opinion surveys indicate that many Americans do not know what is in that bill. Even though regulations increase the cost of managing the system, health care services cannot follow market rules and require regulation. Evidence shows that people choose their health insurance plans incorrectly and do not minimize the costs. Media's role is very important in educating the public about the facts. Although the current situation is not satisfactory, there has been a remarkable improvement in the way media is helping public understand the issues.