

From the Heart...

...Lifeskills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Celebrating our no fears conversation, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 2, 2016)

During this lifeskills month *Celebration* in December, the focus will continue with a “no fears conversation” about a number of topics that are part of what may be coming our way with our new President-Elect and Congress. In what kind of package they come will depend on how our representatives and each of us conduct the conversation here at home and across the nation.

May we continue with a rare and timely opportunity to give thanks for our families, our community, and our nation. My hope is we all will be able to celebrate this month and say to each other, “That is what freedom looks like.”

So, let's begin with a topic we all face at some point in our lives, healthcare. For many, going to the doctor or checking into a hospital is a frequent routine, particularly those who face something chronic or life-threatening. What do you see as our President-Elect's and new Congress' plan for healthcare reform? Can we put aside our angst and anger at the moment to take the first step toward helping each other achieve a better healthcare system in our nation?

How about first checking out their task force report published June 2016 (<http://abetterway.speaker.gov/?page=health-care>). You can do a quick read via their snapshot, Fact Sheet, or the FAQ page. Yet, I encourage you to read through the full

report and highlight what is important to you. To seek, reach, and achieve a comprehensive, patient-centered, fully accessible 21st century healthcare system what do you want to see as part of the package? Basically, as quoted in their Fact Sheet, our coming Congress is proposing what their plan will mean for our families:

- **More choices and lower costs.** Our plan gives you more control and more choices so that you can pick the plan that meets your needs—not Washington’s mandates.
- **Real protections and peace of mind.** Our plan makes sure that you never have to worry about being turned away or having your coverage taken away—regardless of age, income, medical conditions, or circumstances.
- **Cutting-edge cures and treatments.** Our plan clears out the bureaucracy to accelerate the development of life-saving devices and therapies.
- **A stronger Medicare.** Our plan protects Medicare for today’s seniors and preserves the program for future generations.

These sweeping principles all sound great. Yet, what do they really mean? And more importantly, how will they be implemented? Some hints as to the “how’s” are mentioned in their FAQ sheet. Here is their 30 second explanation consisting of “. . . a step-by-step approach to give every American access to quality, affordable health care”:

- **Lower costs** - Helps people get better health care at a lower cost by ending expensive mandates and getting rid of over \$1 trillion in taxes on health care.
- **More choices** - Provides patients with access to financial assistance to choose a plan that fits their needs, as well as more pooling mechanisms, coverage options, and access to wellness programs by getting Washington out of the way.

- **Peace of mind** - Protects those with pre-existing conditions and the most vulnerable, while ensuring every American has financial support to buy the coverage of their choice.
- **Reforms Essential Health Security Programs** - Strengthens and secures Medicare for current and future retirees, and provides Medicaid flexibility for the states.

What words caught your eye? For me, words that imply precondition protection, more choice, lower cost, secure Medicare, and cutting-edge cures and treatments got my attention. Sounds like the good parts of Obamacare are also being incorporated.

Whether we agree or disagree on repealing Obamacare in its entirety remains uncertain at this time, in spite of “A Better Way” plan proposed and to be gradually implemented. I still have a number of questions I would love to ask this Healthcare Task Force. How about you? In the next article, those questions will be the focus.

If you also have a question or two, send them my way. I will try to include them and offer some possible resources for you. I am currently reaching out to our Texas and national Congressional representatives to engage in offering input, alongside healthcare professionals I know.

Since they seem to be taking a step-by-step approach, instead of one big legislative bill, they say they are now “. . . taking these ideas to the country, so we can give the people a clear choice” Want to step up and engage with them on the next step? This just may be your chance to get free from the angst and anger to become part of the solution for the 21st century healthcare practice and patient. It won't happen without both practitioners and patients like ourselves proactively involved.

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From the Heart...

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Celebrating our no fears conversation, part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 9, 2016)

Here we are again, hopefully having a no fears conversation about one topic that affects us all each and every day, healthcare. Were you able to read through the task force report proposed June 22, 2016 (<http://abetterway.speaker.gov/?page=health-care>)? If not, you can get started with the snapshot, Fact Sheet, or the FAQ page. Yet, you will get a better glimpse of what this report claims to offer by reading the report. Then be sure to highlight what is important to you.

There are seven sections to the report:

- High-Quality Health Care for All
- Obamacare Has Not Worked
- More Choice, Lower Costs, Greater Flexibility
- Protecting and Strengthening Coverage Options for All Americans
- Medicaid Reform: Empowering States and Increasing Flexibility
- Promoting Innovation in Health Care
- Protecting and Preserving Medicare

As you highlight, write down any questions you would like to ask them about each section. I know I have many questions and will be sending them my representatives shortly. How about you? To seek, reach, and achieve a comprehensive,

fully accessible 21st century healthcare system what do you want to see as part of the package? As a quick repeat, as quoted in their Fact Sheet, Congress is proposing what their plan will mean for our families:

- **More choices and lower costs.** Our plan gives you more control and more choices so that you can pick the plan that meets your needs—not Washington’s mandates.
- **Real protections and peace of mind.** Our plan makes sure that you never have to worry about being turned away or having your coverage taken away—regardless of age, income, medical conditions, or circumstances.
- **Cutting-edge cures and treatments.** Our plan clears out the bureaucracy to accelerate the development of life-saving devices and therapies.
- **A stronger Medicare.** Our plan protects Medicare for today’s seniors and preserves the program for future generations.

My first question here is “how do they intend to extend these principles into practice?”

Again, to repeat, some hints as to the “how’s” are mentioned in their FAQ sheet. Here is their 30 second explanation consisting of “. . . a step-by-step approach to give every American access to quality, affordable health care”:

- **Lower costs** - Helps people get better health care at a lower cost by ending expensive mandates and getting rid of over \$1 trillion in taxes on health care.
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- **Reforms Essential Health Security Programs** - Strengthens and secures Medicare for current and future retirees, and provides Medicaid flexibility for the states.

Since they seem to be taking a step-by-step approach, instead of one big legislative bill, they say they are now “. . . taking these ideas to the country, so we can give the people a clear choice” Here’s your chance to engage in the process before anything becomes law. Before it’s too late, want to become part of the solution for the 21st century healthcare practice and patient?

Reading through the report I come up with these questions related to each section:

- ***High-Quality Health Care for All***

QUESTION: With a “wholly integrated system” and the 21st Century Cures Act, how are you going to specifically promote better choices, flexibility, and innovation while protecting our nation’s most vulnerable?

- ***Obamacare Has Not Worked***

QUESTION: If you are going to repeal Obamacare, how are you going to specifically preserve the good parts, such as precondition protection, coverage on dependents, and others?

- ***More Choices, Lower Costs, Greater Flexibility***

QUESTION: With the eight recommendations listed and the “. . . imperative to move in an entirely new direction that reflects a 21st century approach to health care . . .”, how will you not just make insurance plans more available and cost effective for families and employees but also have insurance companies provide more comprehensive coverage for preventative, wellness, and integrative programs and therapeutics (the word “integrative” in the question does not refer to “the system” but to the type of healthcare provided via integrative/functional medicine practices)?

What questions have you come up with so far? The concluding four sections of the task force report and my questions will be covered in the part 3 article, next week. I hope you are giving some time and thought to this very important part of your life and your family.

And if you are wondering where to send your questions for a response, I recommend you contact your Congressional representative for your district. You can then either submit your questions to your representative or request, if possible, they connect you with Congressman Kevin Brady’s office (representing 8th Congressional District, Conroe, Texas). Brady is the Chair for the House Ways & Means Committee and helped author A Better Way task force report.

Please be courteous and respectful as you indicate your interest in offering input, have questions about the task force report and the step-by-step process for healthcare reform.

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From the Heart...

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Celebrating our no fears conversation, part 3

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 16, 2016)

Were you able to read through the task force report proposed June 22, 2016 (<http://abetterway.speaker.gov/?page=health-care>). After highlighting what is important to you, what questions for you came up with each section? There are seven sections to the report: High-Quality Health Care for All, Obamacare Has Not Worked, More Choices, Lower Costs, Greater Flexibility, Protecting and Strengthening Coverage Options for All Americans, Medicaid Reform: Empowering States and Increasing Flexibility, Promoting Innovation in Health Care, and Protecting and Preserving Medicare.

In the previous article, I included some questions for sections 1-3. And since the report reflects taking a step-by-step approach, instead of one big legislative bill, we possibly have some time to give our input in the months ahead. I wouldn't wait although as they say they are now ". . . taking these ideas to the country, so we can give the people a clear choice . . ." Here's your chance to engage in the process before anything becomes law. Before it's too late, want to become part of the solution for the 21st century healthcare practice and patient?

My questions for the first three sections were as follows:

- With a “wholly integrated system” and the 21st Century Cures Act, how are you going to specifically promote better choices, flexibility, and innovation while protecting our nation’s most vulnerable?
- If you are going to repeal Obamacare, how are you going to specifically preserve the good parts, such as precondition protection, coverage on dependents, and others
- With the eight recommendations listed and the “. . . imperative to move in an entirely new direction that reflects a 21st century approach to health care . . .”, how will you not just make insurance plans more available and cost effective for families and employees but also have insurance companies provide more comprehensive coverage for preventative, wellness, and integrative programs and therapeutics (the word “integrative” in the question does not refer to “the system” but to the type of healthcare via integrative/functional medicine practices)?

Do any of your questions match mine? Let’s go to the next four sections. Read those sections one more time before writing down your questions.

- ***Protecting and Strengthening Coverage Options for All Americans***

QUESTION: Since you say that “commonsense protections must be in place to ensure Americans are treated fairly by insurance companies”, how are you going to specifically ensure your recommendations stand firm (Pre-existing Condition Protections, State Innovation Grants, Practical Reforms, High-Risk Pools, Coverage Protections, Open Enrollment Period, Continuous Coverage Protections, Protecting Life and Conscious Rights, Fair Premium)?

- ***Medicaid Reform: Empowering States and Increasing Flexibility***

QUESTION: Historically, Medicaid eligibility was largely limited to low-income children, pregnant women, parents of dependent children, elderly individuals, and individuals with disabilities. However, Obamacare included a Medicaid expansion that allowed states to expand Medicaid eligibility to people under the age of 65 with income up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. Based on reforming this expansion eligibility, how are you going to make sure those who are above poverty level and no longer eligible for Medicaid will have access to affordable insurance that meets their needs?

- ***Promoting Innovation in Health Care***

QUESTION: What kind of innovations are you specifically referring to beside drug and devices development for cutting edge cures? How are you engaging the integrative medicine and function medicine practices and providers in the dialogue, legislation, and implementation process?

- ***Protecting and Preserving Medicare***

QUESTION: Based on the many repeals, reforms, and recommendations being implemented over an appropriate 10 years time period, how are you going to monitor and assess success or failure of so many moving parts? How are you going to stay in touch with patients and providers to assess outcomes from their perspectives?

If you were sitting in front of your congressional representative, what questions would you ask him or her about this report and plan? I am sure as you read through the report it all seems so overwhelming. I understand. Yet, no matter how complicated it looks like,

each of us need to step up to the challenge. Let's keep them accountable to their words and actions so none of us will fall through the healthcare reform cracks. Let's also be a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves, whether they are physically or financially unable to. Are you stepping up?

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Celebrating because we can! part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 23, 2016)

Let's take a breather for the moment from our nation's topsy-turvy election year.

Let's focus on our simply celebrating because we can. No matter what is going on in your life, can you go with me for an enduring time of celebration?

I realize we all have difficulties seemingly coming at us routinely, it seems. You and your family may be struggling financially. There are those who have lost their job and don't know what the future holds for them. Some just got fearful news from their doctor about what they thought was simply a cold or minor ache. I know a few who have recently lost a loved one and find it very hard to celebrate between the tears and grief. There are also those who feel the election outcomes have stolen all their hope.

Believe me, I am not making light of whatever struggles any of us are going through right now. Yet, doesn't it all depends on our perspective? Acknowledging our struggle and pain is important and valid. Yet again, don't we still have a choice how we respond? I believe we all do.

We also have the opportunity to match our thoughts and words with some action. That action, whether simple or stupendous, seals our choice to celebrate. Somehow, we do feel better, more hopeful, and more grateful. We are then able to more clearly see that other person with their struggles. We want to gift that same hope so they too can

feel better and experience what a grateful heart can heal. So, what is lighting up your mind and heart to declare and do something about?

With the help of some thoughtful quotes from Brainy Quotes and others, let's begin to celebrate because we simply can. When we make that choice no matter the struggle, we are already celebrating God's gift of Christmas with family, friends, and strangers alike. We celebrate what is most important . . . our capacity to love and care for one another that lasts forever.

- "Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas. And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time that's set apart to celebrate love, friendship, and God's gift of the Christ child." Amy Grant
- "Just celebrate the life you had, not the life you could've had." Magic Johnson
- "Our many different cultures notwithstanding, there's something about the holidays that makes the planet communal. Even nations that do not celebrate Christmas can't help but be caught up in the collective spirit of their neighbors, as twinkling lights dot the landscape and carols fill the air. It's an inspiring time of the year." Marlo Thomas
- "Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it comes to us. Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or as joy It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity." Henri Nouwen

- “Christmas is the perfect time to celebrate the love of God and family and to create memories that will last forever. Jesus is God's perfect, indescribable gift. The amazing thing is that not only are we able to receive this gift, but we are able to share it with others on Christmas and every other day of the year.” Joel Osteen
- “How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-heroes!” Maya Angelou
- “The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.” Oprah Winfrey
- “Grace is the celebration of life, relentlessly hounding all the non-celebrants in the world. It is a floating, cosmic bash shouting its way through the streets of the universe, flinging the sweetness of its cassations to every window, pounding at every door in a hilarity beyond all liking and happening, until the prodigals come out at last and dance, and the elder brothers finally take their fingers out of their ears.” Robert Farrar Capon (Between Noon & Three: Romance, Law & the Outrage of Grace)

Today, whoever is standing in front of you, show them they are loved and have given you that capacity to celebrate, to care, and commit to sharing that love for the rest of your life, day by day, year by year.

A very Merry and Sacred Promise of Christmas to you all!

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Celebrating because we can! part 2

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Dec 30, 2016)

Well, here comes the New Year! Before all the routine stuff begins to settle in, how about those things you promised yourself to celebrate in the coming year? How do they fit into the routine also coming your way?

Since the elections, the Christmas holidays, and now all the press about Trump's 100 day plan and platform coming our way, how about your first 100 days of the new year? What are they going to be filled with? Will it be more "Oh woe is me" or "Oh boy, can't wait to make a difference"? Where does your heart point you to? Hopefully, it won't just be the "same ole, same ole" of overwhelm and complaining, but simple ways at first to celebrate because you can.

Right now, I bet you are saying, "Please, give us a break! We just don't have the energy for one more thing to think about right now, let alone the next 100 days or year!" Have the elections and holidays simply drained you? Ok, I do understand, really I do. Who wants to think about how to help solve some of our community and nation's biggest problems such as poverty, economy, national security, supporting the constitution, healthcare, tax reform, and more. Not at this moment, that's for sure! The holidays and getting along with relatives you haven't seen for years are exhausting enough!

How do we even begin when we each have so many things needing our attention right within our families, work, and neighborhoods? We have a house to clean up, work to catch up on, bills to start paying on from all that Christmas shopping, and get over that nasty cold caught somehow from someone.

So, before I start in on the new year with “scathingly brilliant ideas” about how you can make all the difference in 2017 in the lives of others, here’s a pause. Let’s find our sweet spot to celebrate New Year’s Eve and Day in a way that will welcome us into a little haven instead of a hangover.

What sweet spot are you going to land in New Year’s Eve and Day? Maybe a friend invited you to their New Year’s Eve party. And New Year’s Day there is the Rose Bowl Parade and all the national championship games to definitely not miss. The irony of it all is, historically, our January 1st started with the Ancient Romans who chose to celebrate on January 1st to honor their Roman god Janus of which January was named.

According to Wikipedia, Janus was the god of gates and doors, symbolizing transition and new beginnings. Janus had two faces—one looking over the past year and the other toward the New Year. This concept has not really changed much over time, except maybe for the type of sports we all watch on that day. Fortunately, they are no long fought to the death. This reflective tradition is still a central idea of how we look on the past year and celebrate the New Year.

So, the only thing I encourage you to do besides having loads of fun and relax without getting drunk, is to give some quiet moments for thoughts and words of gratitude for what happened in your life last year. Then speak hope and confidence for the New Year for yourself and all those you care about. You will then be ready to follow

your heart with purpose and passion on behalf of others around you and for our nation in 2017.

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