

Letters to the Editor

Good isn't good enough

I greatly appreciated, and heartily applauded, Dr. Bynny's essay "Good isn't good enough" in the Spring 2023 issue of *The Pharos*, (pp 2-7). His diagnosis is spot on.

I have spent about three-fourths of my career in the civilian academic health care world, and the rest in the Military Health System (MHS). I'll take the latter every time. It is true that it is, like the Veterans Health System, a government run system. So what? It works. My wife and I both receive our care at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD, and we have been more than satisfied with the quality of care we have received.

The primary purpose of the MHS is, as it has been since the Revolutionary War, the care of active duty military personnel at home and abroad. It does that quite well—in the most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the MHS achieved the lowest died-of-wounds rate in recorded history. Of equal importance in support of combat operations is humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, both domestic and international.

To maintain their clinical skills, health care professionals must, of course, see patients. The MHS provides that opportunity by operating a direct care system that sees active duty members and their dependents as well as retirees and their dependents. In our own situation, we have had several major surgical procedures. Each was managed with skill and compassion and we are very pleased with the results. No prior authorization was required. There were no deductibles or co-pays. Transition to outpatient follow-up was seamless. Our experience is not unique: for the MHS, patient satisfaction and quality of care measures are consistently at or above those of civilian institutions.

In addition—or in support—of its clinical activities, the MHS operates a successful and effective research program: from infectious disease to brain injury to rehabilitation to cancer. It also has highly regarded education and training programs that prepare graduates to complete the requirements of the various civilian certifying agencies.

Winston Churchill is said to have had the sentiment from time to time that, "you can always rely on the Americans to do the right thing... after they've exhausted all the other possibilities."¹ I believe, as Dr. Bynny argues, we have exhausted all the other possibilities, insofar as tinkering around the edges of a hopelessly Byzantine healthcare financing effort is concerned. Getting every American under the same umbrella is the only way out of the mess we're in. The MHS and the VA prove it can be done.¹

Reference

1. The Churchill Project. Americans and the right thing. <https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/americans-will-always-right-thing/>.

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