

What lies ahead?

Advocates of an American type free enterprise health care system for South Africa, are as far off the mark as those taking a Leninist position in Eastern Europe today. We have a free enterprise system for the few who can afford it. The majority still have to be catered for by the State's less and less subsidized system. Within this two tier system there are double standards and inadequate coverage.

There is no longer a possibility to avoid negotiating a new constitutional future for the country. Part of this negotiation will be about what the health care system should be like. Let us hope that this debate will not take the form of emotional sloganeering. Our debate should be informed and public. This will help us to learn from experiences around the globe and avoid discarded and ineffective models.

Some of the questions that should be asked of any proposed plan should perhaps first be agreed upon. Mine would include; does it promote equity of access and standards, are people dehumanised or enhanced by the system, is primary health care adequately catered for, is the plan affordable and are we getting what we are paying for?

Field¹ makes the observation, and I quote at length, "... as medicine has become more and more capable of dealing with a series of conditions that earlier could not be handled, there has been in most countries an ideological shift towards making access to medical care a right of citizenship, available to all regardless of social position, background or income. This "democratisation" of health strongly reflects the idea that is such an important component of the human condition that it should

not, any more, be considered (as it has been) a consumer good, a privilege, or even a luxury, but as a necessity and right. (It has thus rejoined, with a time lag to be sure, education, which in earlier times was considered a privilege of rank and not a universal right.)"

In the mean time, as we go into this new and challenging experience, let us beware of the oversupply of private hospital beds we are witnessing in the country. As someone has said, "a hospital is no place for a sick person: in a hospital one should be able to defend oneself."

SA Family Practice wishes you a year of fulfilment and joy in your work. Thank you for your support.



Reference

1. Field MG. In Field (Ed). Success and crisis in National Health Systems — A comparative approach. New York: Routledge, 1989.