



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
A. Roy Medley, General Secretary



Personal Reflections

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Can We Better the *Better* Health Care Concept?
(Commentary by Kenneth V. Dodgson MD)

Part 5

This is the next segment of a seven-part series on personal responsibility as a part of churches' response to the health care crisis. Kenneth V. Dodgson MD is a retired general surgeon, who spent 24 years with the Board of International Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA, serving at the Jorhat Christian Medical Centre, Jorhat, Assam, India. Dr. Dodgson is a graduate of Franklin College of Indiana, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, and Temple University School of Medicine. Upon returning from India, he became the Director and Staff Surgeon of the Occupational Medicine Program of the University of Rochester Medical Center. He and his wife, Sally, reside in Rochester, New York.

5. "Yes, We Can!"

Why should the church be interested in what individuals do about their health? There are at least two reasons: there are moral implications to the decisions we make to use or abuse our bodies, and the church has a long history of dealing with long-term commitments.

That so many in the richest country in the world, possessing the best medical care available, do not have medical insurance (and thereby have only limited access to medical care) has moral implications. There are moral issues attached to every judgment call and every decision that we make. That we don't consider our decisions to have moral implications does not remove the moral implications. Our dietary indiscretions do have moral implications.

The areas that give us, as individuals, the fullest freedom relate to eating and exercising habits. Most of us feel we are free to eat as much as we like, whenever we like, with whomever we like, any time we like. Most of us feel we are free to exercise as little as we chose and to relax with whomever we chose, any time we chose. Claimed as constitutional rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," this is not freedom, but license. Freedom always imposes responsibility. License does not. The difference creates moral implications.

The exercise of responsible freedom dictates that anyone who chooses to smoke and develops lung cancer, pulmonary stenosis, or chronic emphysema assumes the burden to pay for the medical treatment necessitated by the choices made. The exercise of license presumes that one who chooses to smoke and develops medical problems has the "right" to relegate the financial burden for medical and surgical treatments to someone else.

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The same moral issues arise with respect to dietary over-indulgence and lack of exercise. Responsible freedom dictates that one whose obesity results in hypercholesterolemia, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, etc., assumes the cost of one's own medical care. Exercising the license option, individuals developing resultant medical problems assume someone else or some other agency, frequently governmental, will assume payment of their medical bills.

Morality implies that the individual that fractures a hip as a result of osteoporosis, resulting from a sedentary life style, assumes responsibility for medical care. Again those who exercise their license option assume someone else should cover the costs of medical care.

The point is not complex. The current health care crisis is not going to be solved until a majority of American citizens assume responsibility for the results of the health-related decisions they make day by day. Most of us can do a better job of developing healthier dietary habits and improving our exercise routines. In the end many of us will live happier, longer, lives free of debilitating medical conditions. It will take long term commitment. Church people understand long term commitment. They deal with it every day. Change is not only possible, it is necessary. In the President's catch phrase, **"Yes, we can!"**



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