

Health Insights Today

A SERVICE OF CLEVELAND CHIROPRACTIC COLLEGE

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EDITOR'S LOG

As Crises Converge

By Daniel Redwood, DC

Our society has entered an era of converging crises in three critical areas – health, environment and economics. Many current trend lines in each of these domains are unsustainable and each strongly influences the others. Of countless possible examples, we see this convergence in: (1) the projected bankruptcy of Medicare within a decade unless major program changes are implemented; (2) the fact that air pollution alone is estimated to be associated with 50,000 premature deaths and an estimated \$40-50 billion in health-related costs annually; and (3) the massive economic costs of continued dependence on fossil fuels and the substantial economic benefits reaped by nations and corporations at the cutting edge of green technology development.

It appears that in order to arrive at sustainable solutions for any of these three areas, we must craft holistic approaches to address them all simultaneously. Those of us in the health professions have a major stake in seeing policy changes in both the public and private sectors that address whole systems interactions, both within the health arena and also with regard to related economic and environmental impacts. Convergent problems require convergent solutions. At times, the task can seem overwhelming. But hidden within this challenge are the seeds of humanity's next great breakthroughs.

In this issue of *Health Insights Today*, we feature an interview with Simran Sethi, a University of Kansas journalism and mass communications professor who by her 30s had become a leading cultural figure in the generation that will have to solve these problems or face their severe consequences. Energetic, thoughtful, and extremely well-informed, Ms. Sethi is best known for bringing the urgency of the world's environmental crisis to public attention, particularly among young people. In this interview, she emphasizes the importance of helping people to make the connections between environmental degradation and public health, prosperity and national security.

Central to Sethi's message is that effective journalism must be based on a strong grasp of the facts (what she calls "doing your homework") plus a deep understanding of the people the writer or reporter wants to reach. If either factor is lacking, communication breaks down, as if a phone or Internet connection were cut off early in a conversation. This message also applies broadly to our efforts to convey health information. First, we need to get our facts straight. Then, we have to convey them in language people can understand.

I have tried to do this in another of this issue's articles, "Effects of Soy on Heart Disease and Cancer." The humble soybean has become almost bizarrely controversial in recent years, hailed as a miracle food by some and demonized as a poison by others. As you might suspect, the truth lies somewhere in between, but well toward the healthy side of the spectrum.

One more point about getting our facts in order and trying to communicate clearly. As our regular readers know, *Health Insights Today* has covered the U.S. health reform debate in a number of articles this year. As the legislative process has moved closer to its pivotal moments (September and October promise to provide the climax or immediately precede it), campaigns of disinformation have become more widespread.

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Aside from reading extensively on health and health policy issues, I also participate in a couple of Internet listserv discussion groups. On the American Chiropractic Association members' discussion group, a doctor recently posted a forwarded email that purported to summarize key "facts" about the House health reform bill (HR 3200). The claims in the email ranged from the mundane (audits of self-insured plans) to the alarming (cutbacks on services for special needs children) to the apocalyptic (euthanizing the elderly). I reviewed all 48 claims by reading the actual text of the bill. Virtually all were demonstrably false. My rebuttal to the false claims is posted on The Daily HIT blog (www.dailyhitblog.com).

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. If you hear claims that sound hard to believe, verify them before assuming they're true and passing them on to others.

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