God Politics and Hepatitis-C in Memphis

June 21, 2017 By Carleen McGuffey

The title is my disclaimer, please proceed with caution.

100s come from all over, neighboring states, up the road and around the corner. They camp in their cars, make new friends, and gather in lawns chairs. All have stories of pain, loss, and a lack of basic Health Care. It makes me wonder if legislators opposed to Compassionate Health Care for everyone, shouldn't have to get their vision,dental and medical needs met right here amongst the constituents they are obligated to serve.

Hepatitis-C Testing Memphis

We recently met a young lady who was positive for Hepatitis-C. She stays home with her babies, while her husband works hard in his small business. He has the kind of hands that make me wonder if my lancet can break through the calluses when I test him, permanently stained by mechanics grease, and hard work. They are one of many who fall through the cracks. Not rich

enough to pay for Healthcare but not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid. James and I have been in exactly this situation for most of our marriage. I recently went to the dentist for the first time in 20 years. I had just enough work done to take away the pain, but not enough to prevent future problems. I keep thinking I need to run over to the dental side of the clinic one day when my line dwindles, but it never does.

Under the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans have insurance through online exchanges and Medicaid. But like this family many still lack coverage, especially in states like Tennessee where elected leaders declined to expand Medicaid. The new administration has promised to replace the ACA with something better, and yet the Congressional Budget Office estimates a plan passed by the House of Representatives would leave 23 million more Americans uninsured, particularly people with Hepatitis-C, Mental Illness, and addiction issues. Senate Republicans have yet to reveal the details of their “replace” plan. The fact that they won’t share their replacement

plans scares me. Is it really that bad?

Even with Medicaid a person often can’t afford co-pays and deductibles. States are still rationing Hepatitis-C medicines to people who don’t meet moral standards of behavior, and have advanced Liver Disease. Can you imagine people with High Blood Pressure being required to exercise, cut out sodium and go to therapy before getting blood pressure meds? Or a person with Diabetes being required to lose 30 pounds before picking up insulin? How about men with HIV modifying their behavior before starting Antivirals? Shocked at the thought? Well that is exactly what is happening to people with Hepatitis-C. Medicaid is saying things like “Clean up your life, modify your behavior, turn yellow, then we’ll talk about treatment.“ Its unconscionable to legislate morality and ration medicine according to how sick you are or are not. It disturbs me that more noise isn’t made about the slippery slope implemented by Medicaid. You know… the slope where humans dispense medicine according to feelings, and moral beliefs rather than dispensing medicine when it is prescribed by a Provider. P.E.R.I.O.D

James and I are humbled by opportunities to visit areas in the US, that have REAL poor people. I used to say there aren't any REAL poor people in America, but that was before I visited the Appalachian Mountains and before I served in inner cities. Its a problem.

As a Christian, I understand that Jesus talked more about the Poor than just about anything else. Im learning that trying to look to leadership, pass the buck, or blame others doesn’t do much good so I ask myself. Self? Are you serving the poor? I mean actively behaving in a way that is consistent with your morals, and values? If not, are you willing to pay money so others will? Do you consider the relief of suffering a worthy place to send your money? Yes, yes, yes. Health care is one of the only things I want my Tax Dollar spent on.

Hepatitis-C Testing Memphis

I feel like we have been brainwashed into believing health care is a partisan issue. And if a person is conservative they have a knee jerk reaction to automatically side with people who are leaving millions of our most vulnerable neighbors uninsured, or under insured. If we are to love our neighbor as our self, would we really wish our sons, and daughters to be left without care for a mental illness, addiction, or Hepatitis-C? Can the people who oppose compassionate Health Care agree to receive the same treatment as the neighbor who attends our Clinics for free Health Care?

James and I have been to DC perhaps 10 times. Its always exciting to see our fellow advocates skipping back from certain offices….“We just went to thank them for their support”. While the Legislatures with Christian quotes and scriptures on the wall refuse to listen to us as we plead for help, just a little help for people with Hepatitis-C? Why aren’t the very ones who claim to live by love willing to pay for the relief of suffering in people who need it the most?

As a Christian I see 3 choices. 1.We personally start treating and serving the sick out of our churches or 2.we go into the community as a church to serve or 3.we see to it our tax dollars to be allotted for health care. I cannot imagine Jesus being stingy with resources for the poor. Ever.

Back to Memphis. Many of our clients don’t care about a non complaining organ like the liver when their children don’t eat, or when their own tooth pain deems them incapable of considering anything other than relief. Again, I say legislatures who dictate Health Care Reforms should have to use the Health Care services used by the poorest constituents in their community. Im thinking things would change quickly if that were the case.

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