

TEXAS VOICE FOR HEALTH REFORM

TVHR Health Reform Fact Check: Euthanasia

Debunking health reform myths: Euthanasia scare tactic not true

The Falsehood: Various emails forwarded widely falsely claim that page 425 of the House health reform bill contains provisions to encourage euthanasia or suicide among seniors through mandatory counseling. This fear-mongering is a lie and a cruel distortion of the actual bill provisions. Nothing in the House bill (or the Senate bills) denies seniors care and nothing forces seniors to receive end-of-life counseling or choose how they want to die.

The Truth: In reality, provisions on page 425 of the bill create a way for Medicare to pay for a senior's voluntary counseling with their doctor to plan end-of-life care (commonly done through living wills), in which people can express their wish to either require certain types of care, or to refuse it. This type of planning is common today, but Medicare does not pay doctors for the time they take discussing these issues with their patients; thus the change in law is to encourage health providers to help inform patients about their options.

The scare tactics in emails that mention euthanasia are false, but you don't have to just take our word for it. Many other trusted sources debunk this myth:

- **AARP**, the nation's largest membership organization for people over 50, responded to these false scare tactics¹. They note that common insurance industry practices today (which will be curbed by health reform) deny seniors care based on age.
- **The Annenberg Public Policy Center's FactCheck.org** has a detailed analysis of the false claims and actual bill provisions².
- **Snopes.com** has also researched the claims circulating by email and declared them false³.
- **USA Today** editorial board denounces "fear-mongering"⁴: "At one extreme, rational argument is being drowned out by outrageous fear-mongering. On former presidential candidate Fred Thompson's radio show this month, a commentator claimed that the House health care bill would require sessions to instruct the elderly 'how to end their lives sooner' to save health care funds. This is simply untrue, and would be laughable if so many fearful seniors didn't believe it. Some of the debate in Congress is little better.

Republican critics demonize reform as 'socialism' or a 'government takeover' of health care—a gross distortion of even the most ambitious plan under consideration and a description they decline to apply to popular government medical programs for the elderly and veterans."

Roman Catholic Perspective: For details on official church statements, go to: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/health1.shtml>. The church has articulated several concerns about the end-of-life issues involved in the House's reform bill, but as of today had not posted a specific list of desired amendments in this area. To paraphrase our understanding of the issues, while the church supports the use of advanced directives for end-of-life care, Catholic ethicists have expressed concern that advanced directives not result in the removal of food, water, or antibiotics. They want to make sure the routine end of life counseling called for in the bill does not form the legal basis for denying care of this sort. They also want to make sure that a Health Benefits Council cannot overrule the provision of these services at end of life.

The ethicists also raise concerns that incentives to reward hospitals and health plans for reducing preventable readmissions (i.e., readmissions due to failure assure access to needed follow-up care after a hospitalization) not be set up in a way that results in rationing of care.

CPPP comment: In our view, this sort of incentive should actually increase, not reduce, the amount of care provided; thus we are unclear on what potential scenario concerns the church ethicists.

¹ http://www.aarp.org/aarp/presscenter/pressrelease/articles/mccaughey_statement.html

² <http://www.factcheck.org/2009/07/false-euthanasia-claims>

³ <http://www.snopes.com/politics/medical/euthanasia.asp>

⁴ <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2009/07/our-view-dishonest-debate-mars-bid-to-overhaul-health-care.html?csp=34>