



Examining Health Care: What's the Public's Prescription?

January 2003

The U.S. spends more than any other country in the world on health care — \$1.3 trillion in 2000, or \$4,637 on every man, woman, and child. Yet serious problems with access, cost and quality persist, depriving many people of the care they need and jeopardizing the health of our nation. From doctors to insurance executives, from patients to officeholders, an overwhelming number of Americans say we desperately need to reform health care in this country. But what is the best prescription for breaking down the barriers preventing so many people from receiving appropriate medical care?

At the heart of people's concerns about health care are important questions about what we value as Americans and what we are and are not willing to do to improve health care. Although they are not mutually exclusive, the following approaches reflect different perspectives and priorities that people bring to this critical issue.

APPROACH 1: Connected Parts, Not Fragmented Pieces

The most effective way to improve health care in America is to take firm hold of it and make it run like a true, well-coordinated system. We need to take the existing, unwieldy collection of health care fragments and fashion them into a connected web of health care services, where information flows readily between the pieces and they work in concert. This is the best way to curb costs and provide health care in a timely way.

APPROACH 2: Partners, Not Just Patients

We need to create new relationships in health care where consumers and professionals work hand in hand, with people becoming partners in their health care. We need to take time to communicate, to help people make informed decisions, and to educate for healthy lifestyles. This is the best way to improve the health of Americans and to lay a firm foundation for personal responsibility and prevention that will result in long-term savings.

APPROACH 3: Care for All, Not Just for Some

We need to set new priorities in health care aimed at providing Americans the care they need when they need it. We need to seal up the cracks in the system so that people don't fall through. We need an unflinching commitment providing the medical treatment that each person needs. This is the best way to improve individual health and prevent illnesses that are more difficult and expensive to treat.

Approaches and Choices; Choice Work, and NIF

If you're preparing to moderate a National Issues Forum, then you've become familiar with the structure of deliberative dialogue that NIF supports. Discussion guides, starter tapes, and deliberative forums focus on approaches, sometimes also called "choices" in NIF material.

And you know that each approach represents a distinctly different way of approaching an issue, with its own set of benefits, drawbacks, and tradeoffs.

This structure undergirds the basic premise of public deliberation — that citizens in a democracy have a responsibility, and need opportunities, to make choices about how they want to live together, how they want to act together, how they want their government to function.

Sometimes, forum participants find these uses of the word "choice" confusing. Some assume that they are being asked to choose one of the approaches. And, of course, they are not.

Many moderators find it helpful to clarify, at the beginning of the forum, that the work of the forum is to weigh each approach, to "work through" consequences and tradeoffs, and to form a shared sense of what's at stake in the issue. They make it clear that by developing shared directions for public action, forum participants are laying the foundation for making public choices together.

If this is your first experience as a moderator:

You don't have to be an expert on the issue.

Reading the issue book thoroughly, considering questions that get to the heart of the issue, and thinking through the essence of each choice is the critical part of preparation.

Stay focused on what the forum is about — deliberation.

Your natural curiosity and your interest in understanding diverse views will be your greatest assets; they're probably what got you here in the first place. So use them to ask questions that probe the underlying motivations of each choice, the tradeoffs it might require, and the willingness of the participants to recognize them.

Keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue.

No matter the level of experience, most moderators find timekeeping to be a challenge. National Issues Forums examine complicated issues, worthy of deep discussion. Sometimes it's hard to move on to another approach with so much more that could be said. But in order to deliberate — to really make progress on the issue — participants need the opportunity to weigh all the major approaches.

Reserve ample time for reflections on the forum.

Between allowing time for participants to lay out their personal concerns about the issue at the beginning of the forum and the demanding work of deliberating in depth on each of the choices, it's easy to find yourself with little time left at the end of the forum to reflect on what's been said. But, in many ways, this is the most important work the group will do — if they have time to do it. Explain clearly at the outset that it is important to reserve this time, and then enlist the participants' support in working with you to preserve it.

Your Role as a Moderator:

- to provide an overview of the process of deliberation — the rationale for the kind of work the participants are getting ready to do.
- to ask questions that probe deeply into what's at stake in the issue and in each choice.
- to encourage participants to direct their responses and questions toward one another.
- to remain neutral throughout the discussion, while encouraging participants to explore all facets of their own and others' opinions.
- to keep track of the time, so participants can move through a discussion of each of the major approaches and into an ending period of reflections.

The Role of the Recorder:

- to support deliberation by reminding forum participants of their key concerns, the areas of greatest disagreement, and the benefits and tradeoffs their discussion highlighted.
- to serve as a written record of the group's work that might feed into future meetings of the group or additional forums.
- to help inform other members of the community about the outcomes of the deliberation.
- to capture the tensions, tradeoffs, and common ground for action.
- to express main ideas in clearly written brief phrases.

Forums or Study Circles — or Both?

Many NIF convenors choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last two- to two-and-one-half hours.

Many others, however, arrange multiple sessions (study circles) to allow participants greater opportunities to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings; others might devote a separate session for each approach. And some plan ahead of time for a session after the forum to come back together to consider next steps.

Some communities begin their examination of an issue in a large group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse also can be helpful — starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum.

National Issues Forums is about encouraging public deliberation. The needs of your community will drive the schedule in which deliberation can best occur.

Guidelines for National Issues Forums and Study Circles

At the beginning of deliberative discussion, most moderators review these guidelines with participants. (A free poster with these guidelines is available to use in your forum. You may request a copy by calling 800-600-4060.)

The moderator will guide the discussion yet remain neutral. The moderator will make sure that —

- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals dominate.
- The discussion will focus on the choices.
- All the major choices or positions on the issue are considered.
- An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of the alternatives is maintained.
- We listen to each other.

The importance of the questionnaires

Questionnaires play an important role in your local forum — and in the national NIF network. Filled out after the forum, the questionnaire serves multiple purposes. It gives participants an opportunity to reconsider their views in light of the experience they have just had. And it gives them an opportunity to add to what they said or heard in the forum.

The questionnaires also serve a vital role outside of the forum. As a means of capturing what happened in the forum, they provide information that can be used to communicate participants' views to others — to officeholders, to the media, to other citizens.

Nationally, a report on the outcomes of the forums on a given issue is produced each year, based on extensive interviews with moderators and the questionnaires that forums generate. Some communities use questionnaires as part of reports on the outcomes of local forums.

So it is very important that you, as the forum moderator, take a few minutes to gather and return the questionnaires to the National Issues Forums Institute. Please include the moderator response sheet on page 12 with your contact information so that follow-up for the national report is possible.

Return the completed questionnaires to:

**National Issues Forums Research
100 Commons Road
Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777**

Communicating about your forums

Another important role of the moderator is to communicate with the NIF network about the forums you are conducting in your communities. Please post the dates and locations of your forums by E-mail at forums@nifi.org.

Examining Health Care: What's the Public's Prescription?

Questions to Promote Deliberation of the Issue

As you examine this issue together with forum participants, you (and they) will undoubtedly think of questions that are at the heart of what make the issue compelling. Many of these questions will arise during the forum, based on responses of the participants to you and to one another.

Moderators find it very helpful to consider ahead of time the basic, broad questions about each approach that need to be addressed. Here are some possibilities:

APPROACH 1: Connected Parts, Not Fragmented Pieces

- When do you feel the health care system is working best?
- Who should do what to create better accountability practices?
- What kinds of problems have you experienced in health care that you would chalk up to lack of coordination?
- What are you willing to do to help the system run better? What does this approach require from you?
- If you were going to rate your hospital or provider what would you like to grade them on?
- What do HMOs, hospitals, physicians, nurses, and insurance companies do well?
- How does Approach 1 make health care more cost effective and more efficient?

APPROACH 2: Partners, Not Just Patients

- Describe the kind of relationship you want to have with your health care system/providers. With your doctor, nurse? What qualities are you looking for in a health care provider? (i.e., compassionate, trustworthy, efficient?)
- How would we characterize the ways that people get treated differently in the health care system?
- If more people were to act on their rights and responsibilities what would be the impact on care and access?
- Are you familiar with your provider's policy regarding your rights?
- What are fair ways to encourage personal responsibility for healthy lifestyles?
- How much of our self-education regarding our health is our responsibility? How much of this responsibility rests on providers and insurers? What responsibilities does the pharmaceutical industry have to provide us with accurate, fair information and fair prices?
- How does Approach 2 make health care more cost effective and more efficient?

APPROACH 3: Care for All, Not Just Some

- Describe the biggest barriers people face in accessing appropriate health care.
- How many of you don't have health insurance? What services do you use? Does your insurance plan give you the access to the services you need?
- For those of you with insurance, does your plan give you the access to the services you need? How comprehensive is your health care coverage? What does it cover?
- What are the basic elements of health care that each of us should have? What can we do without?
- If we had access to health care for all Americans what would that really look like? How would we want it to work?
- Would you accept less comprehensive services, so that more Americans could have basic services?
- How does Approach 3 make health care more cost effective and more efficient?

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Health care is a profoundly personal experience that has immense public consequences. The care we get — or don't get — affects our ability to lead long and healthy lives. It has ripple effects throughout our society, influencing children's ability to succeed in school, the productivity of American workers, and the lifestyles of our aging population. From patients to politicians, from doctors to insurance executives, an overwhelming number of Americans say we desperately need to reform health care in this country.

Careful thought and deliberation are needed to understand the nature of the problems in health care and to consider possible courses of action. Although they are not mutually exclusive, the approaches outlined on these pages reflect different perspectives and priorities that people bring to this critical issue.

Approach One

Connected Parts, Not Fragmented Pieces

The most effective way to improve health care in America is to take firm hold of it and make it run like a true, well-coordinated system. We need to take the existing, unwieldy collection of health care fragments and fashion them into a connected web of health care services, where information flows readily between the pieces and they work in concert. This is the best way to curb costs and provide health care in a timely way.

What Can Be Done?

- Citizens and professionals could serve on health care councils that coordinate the use of facilities and medical services within a region.
- Health care providers could develop systems to share patient information and coordinate care.
- Patients could make sure their doctors are aware of treatments from other doctors and could carry a "health passport" card containing their medical history.
- Insurers could set guidelines to reduce unnecessary medical tests, and medical schools could educate physicians to use costly procedures efficiently.
- Legislators could enact laws to increase the monitoring of health care billing practices and stiffen penalties for fraud.
- Congress could establish a nationwide mandatory reporting system to monitor and learn from medical errors.
- Hospitals could limit the use of emergency rooms to emergency care only.
- Legislators could set caps on awards for medical lawsuits.

A Likely Tradeoff?

- This approach uses scarce health care resources to develop systems for coordinating medical care rather than providing direct care to patients.

Concerns about This Approach

- Increased legislation adds extra layers to a health care system already choked by bureaucracy.
- Making personal medical records more available makes personal privacy more vulnerable.
- Limiting malpractice awards constrains citizens' rights for appropriate compensation.
- Focusing on medical errors casts doubt on the vast majority of medical professionals who are highly skilled and competent.

Three Approaches

Approach Two

Partners, Not Just Patients

We need to create new relationships in health care where consumers and professionals work hand in hand, with patients becoming partners in their health care. We need to take time to communicate, to help people make informed decisions, and to educate about healthy lifestyles. This is the best way to improve the health of Americans and to lay a firm foundation for personal responsibility and prevention that will result in long-term savings.

What Can Be Done?

- Insurers and health care administrators could support more face-to-face time between doctors and patients.
- Medical school training could focus on doctor-patient collaboration and “patient-centered care.”
- Media and schools could provide more information about health risks, such as smoking and obesity.
- Citizens could serve on medical licensing, review, and health assistance boards.
- Employers could involve employees in decisions about health plans, benefits, and costs.
- Individuals could take more responsibility for practicing healthy habits and preventive health care.
- Insurers could charge higher premiums to customers who engage in risky health habits.
- Legislators could pass laws to protect patients’ rights to appeal decisions by insurers.
- Community groups could provide health education and opportunities to discuss public health care policies.

A Likely Tradeoff?

- This approach depends on the time-consuming work of changing relationships and personal habits rather than addressing existing gaps in health coverage.

Concerns about This Approach

- Many people will not be willing or able to be so involved in learning about their illnesses and treatments.
- Demands for physicians’ and nurses’ time will strain a system that is already stretched too thin.
- Doctors should focus on practicing effective clinical treatments, not developing personal relationships.
- Shared decision making confuses who is responsible for medical decisions and treatment.

Approach Three

Care for All, Not Just for Some

We need to set new priorities in health care aimed at providing Americans the care they need when they need it. We need to seal up the cracks in the system so that people don’t fall through. We need an unflagging commitment providing the medical treatment that each person needs. This is the best way to improve individual health and prevent illnesses that are more difficult and expensive to treat.

What Can Be Done?

- Clinics could offer more flexible hours and use mobile units to provide health care services in underserved areas.
- Communities could strengthen incentives for doctors to work long-term in underserved rural and urban areas.
- Medicaid and CHIP could be expanded to allow citizens to purchase coverage if they earn too much to qualify for free coverage.
- Health agencies could oversee services to ensure unbiased treatment of females, minorities, and the uninsured.
- Governments could provide tax credits to employers who offer comprehensive health insurance, including mental health, dental, and optical care.
- Community volunteers could provide transportation and deliver prescriptions, and health providers could donate health services to those in need.
- Medicare could be expanded to provide low-cost prescription drugs to senior citizens.
- Legislators could create a system that uses tax dollars to provide health coverage for all Americans.

A Likely Tradeoff?

- This approach will divert funding from other public services or will require Americans to pay more in taxes or insurance premiums.

Concerns about This Approach

- Providing care to everyone will overwhelm the health care system, causing shortages, rationing, and long waits.
- Providing free services limits self-sufficiency and creates dependency.
- Increased governmental involvement will detract from health care services better provided by the private sector.
- Expanding publicly funded health care forces taxpayers to pay even more for the health care of others.

Suggested Format for an NIF Forum or Study Circle

Welcome

Let participants know who is sponsoring the forum/study circle. Stress the cosponsorship if several organizations are involved.

Ground Rules

MAKE CLEAR THAT THE FORUM IS NOT A DEBATE. Stress that there is work to do, and that the work is to move toward making a choice on a public policy issue. The work will be done through deliberation. Review the paragraph “How Do We Do It?” (see page 11). The responsibility for doing the work of deliberation belongs to the group. Deliberation is necessary because there are competing approaches to solving the problem.

Starter Video

Explain that the video reviews the problems underlying the issue, then briefly examines three or four public policy alternatives. In so doing, it sets the stage for deliberation. (Starter videos for each issue book are available from Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company at 1-800-228-0810.)

Personal Stake

Connect the issues to people’s lives and concerns — in the first few minutes — by getting participants to talk about their personal experiences with the issue, and to tell their stories. This makes the issue genuine, human rather than abstract. Some questions you might ask include: “Has anyone had a personal experience that illustrates the problems associated with this issue?” “Within your family, or circle of friends, is this an important issue?” “What aspects of the issue are most important to you?” “How does the issue affect people?”

The Forum/Study Circle Deliberation

Consistent with what deliberation is, moderators ask basic types of questions in a forum:

What Is Valuable to Us?

This question gets at why making public choices is so difficult: the approaches turn on things that people care about very deeply, such as being secure or being treated fairly. This question can take many forms:

- How has this issue affected you personally? (Usually asked at the beginning.)
 - What things are most valuable to people who support this option?
 - What is appealing about this approach?
 - What makes this choice a good idea — or a bad one?
-

What Are the Costs or Consequences Associated with the Various Choices?

This question can take as long as it prompts people to think about the likely effects of various approaches on what is valuable to them. Examples include:

- What would result from doing what this approach proposes?
 - What could be the consequences of doing what you are suggesting?
 - Can you give an example of what you think would happen?
 - Does anyone have a different estimate of costs or consequences?
-

What Are the Tensions or Conflicts in This Issue That We Have to “Work Through”?

As a forum progresses, moderators will ask questions that draw out conflicts or tensions that people have to “work through.” They might ask:

- What do you see as the tension between the approaches?
- Where are the conflicts that grow out of what we’ve said about this issue?
- Why is this issue so difficult to decide?
- What are the “gray areas”?
- What remains unsolved for this group?

Ending A Forum/Study Circle

Before ending a forum take a few minutes to reflect both individually and as a group on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:

I. Individual Reflections

- How has your thinking about the issue changed?
- How has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- How has your perspective changed as a result of what you heard in this forum?

II. Group Reflections

- What didn't we work through?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- What tradeoffs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

III. Next-Step Reflections

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned about ourselves in this forum?
- Do we want to meet again?

Questionnaire (Post-Forum)

The Questionnaire is a way to face the conflict within ourselves. Often we discover aspects of each choice we hold most valuable. Yet, the things we care deeply about are often in conflict. Please return the questionnaires and the Moderator Response sheet on page 12 after the forum.

Suggested Time Line

	Stages of a Forum/Study Circle
15% for Opening	<p>Welcome — The convenor or moderator introduces NIF program.</p> <p>Ground Rules — Participants review desired outcomes of forum.</p> <p>Starter Video — The starter video sets the tone for the discussion.</p> <p>Personal Stake — Connect the issue to people's lives and concerns.</p> <p>The Deliberation — Participants examine all the choices.</p>
65% for Deliberation	
20% for Ending the Forum/Study Circle	<p>Ending the Forum — Reflect on what has been accomplished.</p> <p>Questionnaire — Participants complete Questionnaire.</p>

NIF Forums and Study Circles

Why Are We Here? What Are We Going to Do?

We are here to move toward a public decision on a difficult issue through CHOICE WORK.

How Do We Do It?

Through a deliberative dialogue in which we:

- Understand the PROS and CONS of each approach, its BENEFITS, DRAWBACKS, and TRADEOFFS.
- Know the STRATEGIC FACTS and how they affect the way the group thinks about each option.
- Get beyond the initial positions people hold to their deeper motivations — the things people consider to be most valuable in everyday life.
- Weigh carefully the views of others; appreciate the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- WORK THROUGH the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what people consider valuable.

How Can We Know If We Are Making Progress?

By constantly testing your group:

- Can your group make the best case for the approach least favored?
 - Can it identify the negative effects of the approach most favored?
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

To order the *Health Care* issue book and starter tape call 800-600-4060, fax 937-435-7367 or mail to National Issues Forums publications, P.O. Box 41626, Dayton, OH 45441.

Moderator guides and forum posters are also available.

Other tapes may be ordered by calling Kendall/Hunt at 800-228-0810.

For other information and comments, visit the NIF Web site at nifi.org or call NIF Research at 1-800-433-7834.

To post the dates and locations of your forums, E-mail: forums@nifi.org.

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Moderator Response

After the forum, please complete this brief response sheet and return it with the questionnaires from the forum.

Moderator's Name _____

Phone _____ **Date and location of forum** _____

Briefly describe the audience of your forum including city and state, diversity, age of participants, number of participants.

What elements of this issue seemed most difficult to the participants?

What common concerns were most apparent?

Were there tradeoffs most participants would accept? Describe.

Were there tradeoffs most participants would not accept? Describe.

Did the group identify shared directions for action?

Return with questionnaires to:

National Issues Forums Research

100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2777

www.nifi.org

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Please share a story that illustrates some of the problems associated with health care in your community.

Think of examples of how health care issues and concerns affect everyday life in your community. Please describe.

Describe how the citizens in your own community have responded to the health care concerns locally. How about nationally? Please share what appears to be working or not working.
