

# Government Control of Medicine: Thanks, But No Thanks

*by Ralph Hood*

Several years ago my doctor informed me that I have diabetes. I was, of course, horrified. What did I know about diabetes? He gave me info and directions, but I was overwhelmed. Then he handed me a box full of coupons and a list of what to buy at the drugstore.

At the drugstore I stood befuddled at the display counter, confused and addled. Then, slowly, something became evident. In front of me was a whole section filled with nothing but supplies for diabetes control. I was not out on a limb by myself; I was part of a market! People were trying to help! On that counter was everything my doctor had told me to get, complete with instructions, and I had coupons for all of it! Free coupons! These companies were competing to help me with my diabetes. Not only did they do the research and produce the supplies; they also paid their employees to take the information and coupons to my doctor so he could pass them on to me. Other employees called on drugstores and drug wholesalers to arrange distribution. All of that, just to get solutions to my problem delivered to my corner drugstore.

Ain't the free market wonderful?

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Since then, that drugstore counter has changed. Many improvements for diabetics have come to me, totally unsolicited, via that counter. I open a magazine or watch TV, and ads introduce me to the latest tools, procedures, and medicines. I don't do research or seek answers. Instead, manufacturers seek me out; they provide answers and products.

I belong to a wonderful, loving church, but that church has never provided help for my diabetes. Over the years I have contributed in my small way to many charities. Plaques cover my office walls thanking me for services provided to civic clubs, schools, charities, associations, and service organizations. They are wonderful organizations, one and all, but not a one of them has offered a new way to test my blood sugar.

The market—that wonderful American free market—has.

Oh, yes, I explain to my liberal friends, I realize they are not doing it out of the kindness of their hearts. I know they seek to profit from my illness. But, as Adam Smith put it lo so many years ago, they can't get that profit without finding a solution to my problem. Not only that, they must find it faster, better, and cheaper than other companies. The invisible hand is alive and well.

No, I do not wish the government would provide the same services and products

“free.” The market does it so much faster for so little cost. Besides, the government doesn’t do *anything* free.

I trust the market to work like crazy to find even newer and better solutions, and it does. I used to check my blood sugar with finger pricks, and it hurt like hell. Today, a new device works painlessly on my arm. The market is working frantically to provide a bloodless checking system, and I expect it to

be available and affordable any day now.

The market even helps me lower the cost of treating diabetes. Thanks to new information, products, and services, I have cut my use of insulin in half, and still get better results.

One thing does worry me: There seems to be a growing movement to increase government controls in health services. Please Lord, let them stay out of the way. □

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