

I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to *Critical Care Nurse*. I have tremendous respect for nurses -- for the skills, commitment, and compassion you bring to your work. This admiration ^{is in part} inspired by my mother-in-law, Virginia Kelly, who was a nurse for many years, ^{and it} has been reinforced ~~again and again~~ by the dedicated nurses I have met ~~as I~~ ~~work to reform our health care system.~~ *all over the country.*

Today While we have the finest health care system in the world, too many Americans ^{but} cannot get the health care they need. *Today* ^{still} there are nearly 40 million Americans without health insurance -- including close to 10 million children -- and millions more who are ~~grossly~~ *2* underinsured. Despite ~~all of~~ your ~~committed~~ efforts, your skills and compassion never reach the millions of Americans who are shut out of our current health care system.

I have spent the better part of the last 20 months travelling around this country listening to people's stories. I heard about a child running a high fever who was turned away from two hospital emergency rooms because his family did not have insurance, and who later died of meningitis. The child's cousin, whose family did have insurance, was hospitalized for the same disease and lived. As critical care nurses, you have not only heard these families' stories, but have been there as they happen. I can't imagine how anyone who has listened to these families or watched their stories unfold can walk away from the issue of health care reform now.

During my travels, I have also learned from the health care professionals I have met. Many have told me that their hospitals have begun to "economize" by laying off nurses --

putting the high quality of care that their patients now receive at risk. In addition, burdensome administrative requirements force nurses to spend an average of one-third of their time on paperwork. You and your patients deserve better. America's health care system must put patients ahead of paperwork.

As you know, Congress was unable to pass health care reform legislation this session. Well-financed special interests have fought for sixty years to prevent health care reform, and this year they waged an unprecedented battle. The President and I, however, are pleased that we have come further than ever before in the effort to give health security to American families and to preserve the high quality health care that our nation's doctors and nurses deliver today. We are committed to continuing the fight.

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