



September 16, 2009

Health Care Reform and Violence Against Women?

Health care reform is an urgent issue in the U.S. today. As the political "process" attempts to resolve legitimate issues in the debate, the crazies and the insurance companies are trying desperately to derail any efforts to fix a dysfunctional system. Okay. But what does this have to do with violence against women? Lots.

On August 5, 2009, George Sodini (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=8255530&page=1>) walked into a women's gym in Pennsylvania and began shooting. Three women, 46-year-old Heidi Overmier, 49-year-old Elizabeth Gannon and 39-year-old Jody Billingsley, were killed in the attack. He seriously injured 5 others. Then he shot himself.

This carefully planned and executed attack on a group of women was a hate crime. In his online diary, Sodini discussed his hatred of women and his frustration that women wouldn't date him. He blamed women for his problems. And he finally decided to punish women working out at a gym, a group he selected at random just because they were female.

One of the injured women did not have health insurance. So although she survived this hate crime assault, she has huge medical bills. Her friends are organizing bake sales to help out. This is outrageous.

In the wrong place at the wrong time and being the wrong gender. Now she bears the burden of medical bills for care that should have been hers as a citizen of the U.S. and a victim of a hate crime.

Another issue of our broken health care system is its effect on battered women: the insurance companies' denial of benefits to victims of abuse. Another outrage. There are battered women who have been denied insurance coverage because of their "pre-existing condition" of being a victim of their partner's violence.

Again further evidence that the "health care system" we now have has little to do with delivering care to sick and injured people and a lot to do with making money for insurance companies.

We are outraged when abuse occurs and we should be equally outraged at the lack of affordable, equitable care for all our citizens. We cannot wait any longer to fix this "system."

Whatever your particular political feelings are about health care reform, let your elected representatives know. From the President on down the line to your Senators and Representative. Just go on Google and enter "White House" or your Congressperson's name. You can send an email very easily. Don't sit this one out. Our lives, our health, and our futures are at stake.

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune
Founder & Senior Analyst, FaithTrust Institute
www.faithtrustinstitute.org.