

An up-close look at health care

A few months ago, I felt a sudden tightening in my chest that left me very uncomfortable. I put my hands above my head in an attempt to ease my distress, but things only grew worse.

The pain increased and eventually my chest felt like it was going to explode.

It seemed outside the realm of possibility that I could be having a heart attack. After all, I ran a few miles most days and I tried to watch my diet. I get a yearly doctor's check-up.

So how could this be happening?

Then my thoughts were of letting my family down. "How could I let this happen to them?" I asked myself.

As I reached for the telephone to dial 911, I felt the pain ease a bit.

"Maybe this isn't really a heart attack," I said to myself. "I would look pretty stupid if an ambulance arrived and this was really something else," I thought stubbornly.

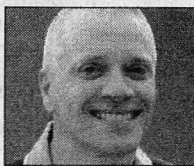
I then went outside to walk our dog around the yard to prove to myself that I was really OK. And while the pain gradually lessened, I knew this was nothing to ignore.

The following morning, I checked in with my doctor. After a battery of tests and scans over a couple of weeks, I was told I had a gallbladder that was not functioning well.

What I had experienced that frightening night was a gallbladder attack from hell, which can very much mimic a heart attack.

I rejected what I believed was an expedient recommendation to have my gallbladder removed. Having any surgery of this kind was the last thing I wanted to do.

I figured if I chose to adhere to an even stricter diet, took an array of vitamins and



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tried every nutty recommendation I found on the Internet, I could get this under control.

After weeks during which I ate mostly apples, celery and wild hickory nuts, I was managing my condition — but not getting any better.

I grudgingly threw in the towel after getting a second opinion, which concluded that I was only fooling myself. So I opted to have the surgery during the week of Christmas, when I could be pampered by my family at home.

When I entered the pre-op room, I was amazed at the number of patients all around me being prepped for surgery. There was someone in every bed.

There also seemed to be a combination of six doctors, nurses and specialists buzzing around each patient.

A nurse came over to me and related that Christmas week had never been busy like this before. "Everyone is afraid of what ObamaCare is going to do to their health care, so they've all scheduled their surgery before the

end of the year," she said matter-of-factly.

"You aren't serious?" I asked.

"I'm dead serious. Health care is going to end up being a mess," she declared boldly.

With that comforting thought, I was wheeled into the operating room right on schedule at 7:30 a.m.

Remarkably, a mere three hours later, I was sitting with my wife at my kitchen table eating eggs, toast and coffee without my gallbladder. I felt better than I had in months.

The experience only reinforced to me what a very fortunate nation we really are. Nowhere but in the U.S. could such a highly skilled operation have been executed so effectively at a time of my choosing with the doctors I preferred.

While I lean to the right politically and have been opposed to a public option in health care reform, I do believe all Americans — including those with pre-existing conditions — should have the same access I experienced.

And, hopefully, at a more affordable rate.

That we must do.

Unfortunately, I have little confidence that Congress is getting this critical issue right.

The grotesque display of extorting votes to rush through the health care bill — instead of really improving for all Americans the best health system in the world — has been beyond disheartening.

Over the coming weeks, we may have one final opportunity to make our voices heard to maintain the excellent health system we are fortunate enough to have.

Let's tell our politicians to take the time to get this right without the games.

Ray Muth of Jefferson Township is a community columnist for the Valley News Dispatch.

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