

# Poor Don't Hurt for Medical Care

**P**UBLIC interest in socialized medicine seems to have quieted down this spring, but it still is a live topic for political bombast.

Candidates continue to advocate additional public health programs on the premise that poor people cannot afford to have their ailments treated. This was rebutted by Harry Schwartz, researcher affiliated with Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, in an article published in the Wall Street Journal some weeks ago.

Schwartz declared "there are hard statistics showing that the nation's poor get, on the average, as much as or more medical care from physicians and hospitals than those in more affluent income groups." He cited government data that have not been widely publicized.

"The poor in this country get more care from physicians and hospitals than any other group of Americans," Schwartz wrote, "a result that is not surprising since many people are poor because they are sick and because this country

has a very expensive system for providing the poor with medical care that costs them little or nothing directly."

The idea of having government provide medical care without collecting more patients appeals to many. Economists have repeatedly declared that such "free care" actually costs more and that its quality is likely to be lower.

Business Week has published (May 19, 1980) a roundup story on what it calls "The costly aftermath of the swine flu scare." This venture of the United States government into the subsidized practice of medicine was a fiasco almost without parallel among federal "goofs."

Motives appeared to be altruistic, but with political overtones. Congress, at the request of the president, appropriated several hundred million dollars in 1975 to pay for vaccination of 150 million citizens in an effort to head off an expected swine flu epidemic.

Practically everything went wrong. The epidemic didn't materi-

alize. One company manufactured 2 million doses of the wrong kind of vaccine. Serum companies refused to accept responsibility for ill effects, so liability was assumed by government.

The public wouldn't go for it and only 46 million people were vaccinated. Of these some 300 suffered paralysis and some died.

Now the government has had 1,167 lawsuits filed in which plaintiffs claim everything from sore arms to fatalities. They are asking \$3.5 billion in damages, including some \$150 million in suits filed by Oklahomans. The average settlement so far has been \$33,500.

Medicare and Medicaid started in 1967 with what now looks like a modest combined cost of \$5.8 billion. Total outlay for 1980 will be 10 times that. Besides, other patients will pay more for health care because they must absorb the difference between rates hospitals charge and what government chooses to pay.

The "medicrats" are short on facts to back up their promises.