

Costs of Health Care Keep Going Up

ANNOUNCEMENT that it would take the equivalent of all money from crops and livestock produced by Oklahoma farmers in a year to pay the state's health care costs is a comparison with many implications.

According to the Oklahoma Health Planning Commission, Oklahomans spent \$3.9 billion for health care services in 1981, while value of agriculture production was \$3.1 billion.

The cost of health care continues to rise, while net farm income has skidded further. A projection by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicates that a 50-fold jump in medical care costs in 40 years may double again by the end of this decade.

While back Tom Costello of Oklahoma City sent a page from the Massachusetts Medical Society Publication in which Arthur M. Silks, M.D. of Garden Grove, Calif., undertook to show that doctors were not responsible for high medical costs.

His point was that physicians received a lower percentage of sky-

rocketing health care costs than they had in the past. He failed to note that in those days physicians often rendered home care medical services, while now they may require hospitalization of patients.

Hospitals are no longer like those of the past, either. When rooms cost \$5 or \$10 a day they usually contained only a hand-cranked bed, a small table and a straight chair. Air conditioning was provided by an open window and electric fan. No carpets, no phones, no radio, no TV, and no costly electronic diagnostic or treatment equipment.

Today's hospital patients demand first class facilities with many devices for their comfort and others are considered essential for convenience of doctors, technicians, nurses and accounting offices.

Average daily charges amount to several hundred dollars a day, quickly exhausting patients' funds. So, what is euphemistically called "health insurance" came into existence. This includes various devices whereby costs are borne by entities other than patients and families.

The Department of Health and Human Services reported for 1981 that health insurance companies paid 26.2 cents per dollar of health care costs. Federal government paid 29.2 cents, state and local governments paid 11.1 cents and 1.4 cents was paid by charity or employers. Patients paid only 32.1 cents per dollar of health care provided.

Because many patients realize that they could never pay such enormous bills and won't have to under Medicare/Medicaid, they may pay little attention to what hospitals and doctors charge. A single trip to a hospital paid by Medicare/Medicaid often costs more than all Social Security taxes an elderly patient has paid in his working lifetime.

The health care industry accepts "socialized medicine" because its escalating charges are paid, patients accept it because their bills are paid for them, and politicians like having both dependent upon them. As a congressman said: "We're spending more and not feeling any better!"