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## Readers' Forum: Health care reform debate too important, get the facts

By Dr. William Walker  
Guest commentary

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THIS IS a critical time for national health care reform and we cannot let this opportunity to fix our broken system pass. As Contra Costa County's Health Officer and a practicing physician for three decades, I see up close what happens when people don't have health insurance.

With the current economic downturn, many more people are having to turn to the public health system for help. I am reminded daily of how desperate the situation is because there are so many people without health insurance and there are fewer and fewer resources available to serve them.

In all my career, I have never been so afraid of what may happen to the health of our communities. Public health systems are holding together the safety net with

Band-Aids. Our emergency room is bursting at the seams and it is the same case for emergency rooms around the country. This health care crisis affects everyone.

I am deeply concerned about the amount of misinformation that is circulating on what proposed health care reform will do. The rumors that people who have health insurance will be forced to give up their coverage and change doctors or that seniors will be euthanized are absurd and completely false.

It is not surprising that people are repeating this kind of misinformation. Health reform is a very complicated and confusing subject. Everyone should be asking questions and looking for reliable answers.

Unfortunately, some of the confusion is being encouraged by special interest groups with economic or political motives.

Originally these groups agreed to support the administration's efforts to reform health care, but now they are scrambling to maintain their piece of the pie and are trying to incite fear and anxiety with false information.

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Look at the proposed health care reform language and you'll see the truth.

Across the country, the faith community and other advocates who seek to improve our broken health care system are trying to speak over the shouting. I applaud the efforts of groups like the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO). They are encouraging truthful discussion on health care reform.

I urge everyone to participate in forums where questions can be answered and the voice of the people can be heard.

I understand that some people are worried about how change may affect them. The proposed reform doesn't take anything away from those with insurance.

What it does do is give everyone affordable and adequate health care — which we all deserve and want for ourselves and our families.

For all of our health, we must cut through all the rhetoric and embrace health care reform now.

Walker, M.D., is director and health officer for Contra Costa Health Services in Martinez.

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