

Forums for a Future¹

Podcast # 31: More Expensive and Invasive Healthcare OK with Florida Department of Health

K. Edward Renner, PhD²

What would you do if you the hand surgeon told you the **only** treatment available for your condition was to cut open your hand – finger and palm – and takes 3 months to heal. That you would need physical therapy and the condition might return. Then you pay a visit to Google and out pops an alternative treatment with no cutting open, a two-day recovery period and a better track record of solving the problem?

I wrote to the surgeon 48 hours after receiving the alternative procedure. I offered to show him my hand so that he could see the results. But, he ignored my offer. So, what next?

You might decide to complain about the hand surgeon.

The mission of the Florida Department of Health! is to:

"...promote, protect and improve the health of all people in Florida."

The Surgeon General of the Florida Department of Health, Dr. Ana Viamonte, commits the department to "...act on behalf of the people for the greater good...(and) to be accountable and credible to those we serve."

Based on my experience I can tell you what would happen if you decided, as I did, to complain to the Florida Department of health.

- You need to find a simple three page complaint form hidden on the third layer of their website, and which is not recoverable using their search function.
- Once you do find it, you fill out the form including a release of information page that entitles the department to access your medical records.
- You put it in the mail.
- You wait for reply.
- You receive an answer.
- You read the letter.

"We need your medical records from the surgeon. According to Florida law the patient...is entitled to a copy of the patient records. **THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH WILL NOT ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PAYMENT OF THESE RECORDS.** ... If we do not hear from you with in 30 days we will take no further action."

That can't be correct. They already have my signed release of information forms, and my records would have no bearing on whether the surgeon (a) did not know about the procedure, or (b) knew

about the procedure and wasn't telling his patients. Either way it is violation of acceptable medical standards.

So I called the department of health.

(Video/Audio clip from telephone call.
Transcript is not available. See video or audio version.)

So, now you needed to:

- Write the surgeon and asked for your records
- Put it in the mail.
- Wait for reply.
- Receive your records.
- Attachment the records to the Health Dept Form
- Put them in the mail.
- Wait for reply.
- Receive an answer.
- Read the letter.

"Thank you for submitting your complaint to the Consumer Services Unit of the Department of Health. Our medical consultant has reviewed your complaint. We have determined from the review that the above health care practitioner has not violated the laws or rules that regulate his/her profession. Therefore no further action can be taken."

Now I get it!

The Department of Health is part of the problem! Florida is one of the four highest levels of cost and one of the poorest levels of quality of healthcare in the country. The 2009 Dartmouth Institute report on Health Care Spending Quality and Outcomes compiled the data from Medicare records.³

And, when you are all done with this complaint procedure, you will be asked to fill out a multiple choice survey about your level of satisfaction with the department's service.

Or, you could just make a you tube video, like I am doing, and send it to the health editors of Florida newspapers, all your friends, Facebook, twitter or whatever.

In the current healthcare debate, everyone is concerned about improving the quality of healthcare and cutting costs.

It is simply not acceptable for a surgeon to not keep up with advancements in his field of specialization, nor to continue to perform a more expensive and intrusive procedure when a significantly less expensive and intrusive procedure exists, without informing his patients that there is an alternative.

These are the abuses that comparative effectiveness research is designed to address. This research is an important aspect of Obama's health care proposal. Comparative effectiveness research is the foundation for the art and science of practicing medicine. **It is not rationing** as those who oppose reform claim. They are deliberately misrepresenting the nature of basic medical research. The story of my hand surgery is a real-life case example of the essential changes that are needed, and why.

The biggest challenge is to find anyone to listen. Healthcare reform is not primarily an ideological issue; it is simply one of efficiency and effectiveness. Why should we settle for less than the best value for our money? That is the American Way.

Please feel free to share this message with others.

¹ This essay is based on an audio and video podcast by Professor Renner entitled “**Forums for a Future**.” Text, audio and video copies of the material may be accessed from his website at www.kerenner.com. The direct link for subscribing to the video series from iTunes is:

<http://phobos.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=289289719>

² Professor Renner may be reached at erenner@cas.usf.edu. The podcast series is also available through the University of South Florida at:

https://my.usf.edu/webapps/lobj-podcast-bb_bb60/feed/IDH3400.004S09/podcast.xml

³ Health Care Spending, Quality, and Outcomes: More Isn't Always Better. The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice Center for Health Policy Research, 2009.

http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/atlas/Spending_Brief_022709.pdf