

Testimony for Special Informal Hearing
“Costs of Broken Health Care System, Benefits of Public Option”
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Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA
Department of Medicine, Brigham and Women’s Hospital
Instructor, Harvard Medical School
President and Co-Founder, *Doctors for America*

My name is Vivek Murthy, and I am a practicing internal medicine physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School. I am also the co-founder and President of Doctors for America, a grassroots organization of over 15,000 physicians in all 50 states who are working for meaningful health reform.

Years ago, I made a decision to become a doctor because I wanted to help people move from illness to better health. Like thousands of doctors in America, what got me through many years of training was the promise of one day being able to provide patients with truly good quality care – the care that patients deserve, care which I could feel good about delivering.

For too many physicians, however, we now find ourselves practicing in a system that does not allow us to give patients the care they need. One of my colleagues at a county hospital in California tells the story of a 29 year old single mother of two young kids. She had been working two jobs to provide food and shelter for her kids. But neither of her employers would offer her health insurance and the cost to obtain insurance for her family on her own was unaffordable. She presented to the hospital with a new severe headache and was found to have a brain mass by CT scan of her head. She was also found to have a large breast mass. Pathology of the breast mass and the brain mass both revealed infiltrating ductal breast carcinoma. Despite radiation and chemotherapy, the patient died within 6 months, leaving behind two grade school children. Had she been able to receive regular medical care, her cancer could have been picked up at an earlier stage where it might have been treated. Two young children may not be orphans today if this woman had health insurance.

As a physician, it is frustrating and disheartening to see patients who I can help but who cannot afford to come to the doctor because they don’t have insurance. The uninsured are not just Americans without a home or living in the projects. They are also struggling entrepreneurs, artists, students, and small business owners – they are our own friends and family who simply can’t afford insurance that now costs in excess of \$15,000 per year for a family of four. They are also people who did everything they were supposed to do but simply got sick.

I have had countless patients ask me why insurance companies that are making record profits and paying their executives tens of millions of dollars charge such high premiums that force them and their families to go without health care. So I ask you – what should I