

My name is Tim Hulse. I opened my practice in Plastic Surgery in Bowling Green, KY, in 1982, after 12 years of post-graduate training at Vanderbilt University. Bowling Green has a population of about 50,000, with about 300 physicians. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has about 2.2 physicians per one thousand people, slightly less than the national average of 2.6.

I have been operating on patients for 37 years and have been in solo practice for almost 30 years, treating some cosmetic surgery patients, but more patients with cancer, burns, trauma, and patients in need of reconstructive surgery- both adults and children. My policy has been to see Medicaid and Medicare patients, because many of them need specialized care that would otherwise only be available hundreds of miles away or across state lines. I also see patients who are uninsured and without resources. These patients are referred by other physicians, the free clinic, by a friend or family member, or a charitable organization.

Since 1984, an othodontist, an oral surgeon, a pediatrician, and I have run a Cleft Lip and Palate/Plastic Surgery Clinic through the Kentucky Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs in Bowling Green. This clinic has been available to anyone regardless of their ability to pay for the services. Such services are available in other states, as well. There is no excuse for a child in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, or any other state where these clinics exist, to go without care because of lack of monetary resources.

I made a choice to use part of my time and expertise to do things for those with no means to bear the expense for it, and I am one of over 900,000 doctors in this country.

Since 1995, Commonwealth Health Corporation, which runs one of our local hospitals, opened the Commonwealth Health Free Clinic to provide Medical and Dental care to the working uninsured. There are about 1200 free clinics throughout this country. These supplement the community health departments available across all 50 states.

My friend, Dr. Andy Moore, a plastic surgeon in Lexington, KY, runs a program called "Surgery on Sundays" that provides surgical services to those without health insurance coverage. This is only one of

thousands of individual efforts by physicians across the country to make sure that medical services are available for those who cannot pay.

There are about 100,000 churches in this country. Most religions mandate a service to those in need, including those in need of medical care. You have no difficulty seeing this in action around our nation daily.

One source sites civic organizations in the US as “too many to list.” These entities have mandates to provide service to the people in their communities, many related specifically to medical care. Shriner’s Hospitals, numbering about 20 in the US alone, are a well known for providing some of the most expert treatment in the world at no charge. The Lions Club commitment to eye problems is another well-known example. These organizations actively and aggressively seek out patients for their programs.

Hospitals such as St. Jude Children's Research Hospital provide expert cancer treatment to any child regardless of ability to pay for it.

As I said, I am only one physician. Let’s be extremely conservative, as I am wont to be, and say that only half of US physicians are inclined to practice as I do, volunteering services for those unable to cover the cost. That amounts to 450,000 doctors providing non-remunerated care. If you add in all the other entities that I mentioned above, plus others that I have certainly left out, that amounts to a vast resource for anyone in need of medical care in this country, regardless of their financial situation.

Mr. Chairman, I have had an opportunity to see the type of poverty that is frequently a death sentence. I have spent a significant amount of time delivering medical care in Central America. There you can find the kind of poverty that means living in cardboard house on the side of an unstable ravine, with no electricity, running water, or sanitation where meals are cooked over an open fire, and where lighting an open cup of gasoline is your only means of producing light at night; where the children run around barely clad and frequently unwashed. I have seen children and adults living in multi-acre trash dumps, making a pittance for digging out trash to recycle, living amongst feral

horses, pigs, dogs, cats, and, of course, rats; exposed to glue-sniffers and the occasional human body part; with access only to medical clinics where there are no medications or supplies. This, Mr. Chairman is the type of poverty that can be and frequently is a death sentence.

In the USA, poor or not, if people cannot avoid medical problems by adopting a healthy lifestyle to prevent disease, they can choose to actively seek care and treatment when they have a health problem, and that medical care is best delivered at the local level, in an individualized format by private practitioners who can act as the patient's advocate without extraneous pressures. In other words, there is little reason, other than failure to seek out treatment, for poverty to be a death sentence in this country.