

Recent Observation on the US Health Debate

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Whilst not an expert on the US Health system, it was quite enlightening on my recent trip to California to watch the US Senate Sub-committee on Health Care discuss this topic with key insurance companies. The following statistics and some associated questions from Senate members may be of interest.

Senator Patrick Kennedy from the East Coast of the USA appears to have a high interest in information technology and how it can achieve quality and safety. Whilst the insurers assured the Senator that IT would enable e-prescribing and a multitude of benefits, the following questions were fascinating, and I paraphrase:

Question: *How can 1,300 insurance companies guarantee me that you can share information around quality?*

Answer: *There was no answer provided.*

The Chair of the Sub-committee (whose name escapes me) had this gem:

Question: *Can you (the representative for Aetna Insurance) explain to me the circumstances under which you shed 8,000,000 policy holders? (Yes, 8m – not a misprint. Editor)*

Answer: *We underestimated the cost of proving the service.*

Question: *How did you determine which policy holders would be shed. Was it by disease state or industry?*

Answer: *I am sure it was not done that way.*

Question: *How was it done?*

Answer: *There was no answer provided.*

The most interesting aspect of the debate to me was an older Senator who could not elicit a clear answer from the insurance companies, who finally in exasperation said the following;

Mr. Chair, I feel as though I am not able to be clear in questioning.

Chair: No Senator _____, you are very clear, the answers are not.

We may have a way to go in health reform in Australia, but the journey at least at the moment seems longer in the USA.

(These comments do not reflect the opinion of GPSA and are provided as a view of the individual.)