

FIXING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: The essential role of research.

I knew at the age of seven that I would be a scientist. I chose to focus on stroke because it was unbelievable to me that

it is the third leading killer in this country – and that the best treatment we have only works for three out of 100 people.

The remaining 97 will die or suffer permanent brain damage. I can't accept that.

When we talk about health care reform, research is not always part of the conversation. Once a cure or discovery becomes routine, we take it for granted. We must guard against that.

Imagine a world without research. Would we have wiped out polio or small pox? Would drugs that ease pain and prolong life exist? Would we know the dangerous link between smoking and cancer, or have the knowledge to make healthy choices about diet and exercise?

Research has cured many diseases and improved countless lives. The possibilities for new cures and prevention have never been greater, as we translate knowledge from genetics into health care.

Some say that science contributes to runaway costs – expensive technology used indiscriminately. But science does not make health care decisions. People do, and they're influenced by a distorted payment system that rewards excess and duplication. Health care reform can address this by requiring cost and outcome comparisons of technology, treatments and drugs.

Imagine a future where everyone has access to health care based on the best scientific knowledge possible. By supporting research, that future is within reach.

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Fifth in a series.

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