

My view: Credibility gap exists between supporters, opposers of Healthy Utah

By Paul Gibbs
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When I was told in November of 2009 that I was in end stage kidney failure, I had a large group of top quality physicians present me with a solution: primary care doctors, surgeons and kidney specialists all agreed that the best course of action was a kidney transplant. Not long after, I ran into a friend with whom I'd taken some college courses, and she was convinced that a transplant was a bad idea. She gave me a pamphlet about an alternative therapy involving herbs and other "natural remedies." I read the pamphlet, but in the end, couldn't give it the same consideration I gave to the opinions of my doctors.



When I had a consensus of experts using facts and science, it hardly made sense to go with an ideologically based opinion that didn't seem to have any strong evidence or concrete methodology behind it. Besides, it didn't really offer a solution to the problem, just a way to put off a solution it didn't like.

The case we're encountering concerns differing approaches to closing Utah's health care coverage gap. The Healthy Utah plan is the result of two years of study and deliberation by top state and federal officials, as well as the medical community and insurance industry. It fits research that has been conducted by Ph.D.s at the University of Utah and other credible organizations.

Healthy Utah is supported by top officials in both of Utah's major political parties and has been endorsed by dozens of local organizations ranging from medical groups such as the Utah Hospital Association, Intermountain Healthcare, University of Utah Medical Center to political, religious and business leaders. And it solves the problem of Utah's coverage gap, providing

quality, comprehensive insurance coverage to those who do not qualify either for traditional Medicaid or premium assistance under the Affordable Care Act.

On the other hand, on the anti-Healthy Utah side of the spectrum, we have a much smaller and less impressively diverse group of spokesmen. We see exclusively far-right Republican legislators who oppose Healthy Utah (such as Rep. Jake Anderegg, who recently wrote an op-ed piece published in this newspaper). Among private and public organizations who support either following an alternative plan — such as House Majority Leader Jim Dunnigan’s “Utah Cares” plan — or doing nothing, the only groups we hear speaking up are groups like the Sutherland Institute, which are admittedly ideologically based, and are therefore looking to support ideas within their belief system. And even their actual proposals, such as Utah Cares, don’t actually provide access to quality, comprehensive health care coverage. They simply put off implementing a solution they don’t like, in this case Healthy Utah.

There’s an enormous credibility gap between those who support Healthy Utah and those who oppose it. The credible consensus tells us Healthy Utah is our best option. To follow the opposition would be like taking the advice of that pamphlet, and choosing not to pursue a kidney transplant and instead go for something that sounds less scary and more superficially convenient. But in both cases, this would not fix the problem, and the end result would be something all concerned parties would regret.

Paul Gibbs is a filmmaker and activist from Taylorsville, whose efforts in support of the Healthy Utah plan include producing and directing the short documentary film "Entitled to Life," which tells the stories of some in Utah's coverage gap.