

Nurs 340 Public Health Ethics and Policy Movie Worksheet
Sicko Video

Student Name: Patricia Kraemer

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View the video "[Sicko](#)". Complete the following worksheet based on your awareness of the responsibilities of nurses as citizens and patient advocates. Your textbook and other course materials may be used to support your views. Provide answers to questions below (**pay attention to point values when writing your responses**).

Ethics:

1. **How were each of the following ethical principles demonstrated in the film? Give at least one specific example of actions or situations which demonstrated each principle. (5 points each~30 points)**
 - **Non-maleficence:** Avoiding Harm (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 12). There were many negative examples of this in the movie Sicko. The example that struck me as one of the most harmful was when the largest Health Management Organization in the country, Kaiser Permanente, refused to allow Martin Luther King (MLK) Hospital to treat Mychelle. They insisted that Mychelle's mother transport her by private car to one of their facilities. MLK hospital was also guilty of not avoiding harm by insisting the mother leave when she insisted the child was too ill not to be treated. It is implied in the movie that the child's death could have been prevented if she had been treated at MLK. MLK had an ethical obligation to treat and stabilize her prior to transfer.
 - **Beneficence:** Doing good (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 12). An example of this was in France when the man with diabetes was admitted to the hospital for preventative care. Instead of treating this as a pre-existing condition that pre-empted him from care, the medical system in France used this as an opportunity to treat him before the disease became more serious.
 - **Autonomy:** Honoring self-determination (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 12). St. Joseph Medical Center was a negative example of this when their medical coverage board refused many treatments for Tracey's kidney cancer. When it was researched and decided that a bone marrow transplant was the best option and the couple found a match with his brother, they were turned down again. Tracey even took this to the board that refused to consider the option, again denying respect for their self-determination.
 - **Utilitarianism:** Distributing resources to provide the greatest good for the largest number of people with the least amount of harm (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 13). The movie Sicko did not portray this method of distributive justice that I saw. The other counties visited had an egalitarian system of justice where each person has equal access to equal health services (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 13). The United States (U.S.) healthcare system is supposed to be based on a utilitarian system of justice but Michael Moore portrays it as a healthcare system that is provided for only people who can pay. This does not meet the criterion for a utilitarian system of justice (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 13).
 - **Veracity:** Truth-telling (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 12). The company that Becky Melke sold health insurance for was a poor example of veracity. This company was not upfront about the pre-existing conditions that would prevent a person from obtaining insurance. The French government seemed to be a good example of veracity with their promises that are kept to assist new mothers.
 - **Justice:** Treating people fairly (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 12). The entire movie, Sicko, was about the injustices of the U.S. healthcare system from the 9/11 responders that could not access appropriate health care to the homeless people who were dumped in a shelter after receiving only

minimal treatment. In contrast, in Canada, many surgeons performed a twenty-four hour operation to reattach a man's fingers. In Great Britain, a tourist was treated the same as a citizen. These are examples of justice and treating everyone fairly, regardless of ability to pay.

2. Identify specific ethical or unethical behaviors demonstrated by any two of the following characters/organizations. Give specific examples and label the specific ethical principle from the above list which was (or was not) demonstrated by the character's actions. (up to 10 points each~20 points)

- **Insurance Companies:**
- **Drug Companies:** The drug companies showed a lack of beneficence, non-maleficence, veracity, and justice when they lobbied and contributed to campaigns for the passage of the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization Act. With this law, they now have 800 billion dollars to spend while charging the elderly whatever they want for their prescriptions. They are doing harm while cheating the elderly and treating them unfairly. They were not being truthful about the law they lobbied to support and how it was going to help the elderly afford their drugs.
- **Dr. Linda Pino~(HMO Reviewer):** When Dr. Pino was working for Humana as a reviewer, she was guilty of several unethical behaviors. She admitted to not practicing non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice when she testified that she denied a man a surgery that cost him his life. This was certainly harmful, not in the man's best interest, and unfair, all for a profit for her employer. Humana was also guilty of not practicing utilitarianism with their emphasis on profit instead of the greatest good for the largest number of people. She did practice veracity and beneficence when she testified against Humana.
- **Lee Iner~(Insurance Reviewer-Alias-"Hitman"):**
- **HMO's-Managed Care Health Plans:**
- **US Media & Advertising:**

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3. Considering the film as a whole, do you think there is an essential ethical conflict inherent in public health between distributive justice (utilitarian system) and an individual's right to basic health care (social justice)? Support your view with examples from the film. (20 points)

The U.S. health system is supposedly based on the utilitarian system of justice defined by Maurer and Smith (2009) as distributing care where it will do the most good for the most people (p.13). Based on the movie, the United States does not adhere to the principles of utilitarian justice. Michael Moore portrays the U.S. health-care system as a broken system that provides for only people who can afford to pay. With the insurance companies, HMO's, and drug companies based

on a capitalistic style of economy, I doubt if a pure utilitarian system could exist. There could be a conflict between a pure utilitarian system and social justice because some individuals are going to have to be denied care to serve the greater good in some instances but this was not shown in the movie. The greater ethical conflict demonstrated by the film was the idea of “for profit” companies controlling access to medical care. In this way, I doubt if social justice can exist as long as there are profits to be made from caring for the sick. The HMO’s deny care or then hire “hit men” to find a way to get their money back. The drug companies can charge whatever they want for drugs in this country. In addition, lobbyists have a way of swaying politicians to vote in a manner beneficial for profits.

Public Policy: (Analyze and explain & support your answers.)

1. How did the Bush/Clinton political era contribute to or hinder health care or potential health care reform? (10 points)

Darryl West, Brown University (2005), explains that our system of government is not set up for rapid change (Will Social Security Do to Bush What Health Care Reform Did to Clinton? (para.3). The system of checks and balances in our government supports for change to be gradual and allows for many people to review the proposal and offer opinions (para.3). This also allows for outside groups (lobbyists) to influence our legislators (West, para.4). “The combination of political fragmentation and institutional decentralization virtually guarantees that most change will be slow and small-scale” (West, para.5).

When President Clinton was in office, despite making health care reform a priority and having a Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate, the health care legislation stalled (West, para.9). Clinton’s opponents were to organized and there were arguments amongst his supporters (Lundy and Janes, 2009, p. 126). No one could agree on what needed to be done or how. As Clinton’s popularity diminished and the Democrats lost the majority in the House and Senate, the possibility of major health care reform lost momentum (West, para.9). Small amounts of health care reform was passed during the Clinton administration but nowhere near what the original plan called for.

President George W. Bush focused less on sweeping reforms and more on individualistic policies like the health savings accounts that allow people to have tax-free accounts for their healthcare (Lundy and Janes, 2009, p. 126). If Michael Moore is to be believed, many of the changes to healthcare during the Bush and Clinton administrations added to the profits of many health care organizations and politicians.

Healthcare reform has been attempted and debated since the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Lundy and Janes, 2009, p. 125). With the way our government is set up, the United States executive branch does not have control over what legislative reform is passed. If a President has the support of the public, it is possible that the legislative branch will listen and act. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations began to work within the system to start change. In this way, they contributed to the beginning of a gradual public recognition of the need to change. This has set the stage for the current president, Barack Obama, to make additional small changes. Even though this is not the sweeping reform he initially envisioned, he, too, has had to work within the system. Reforms under the Affordable Care Act passed under his administration allow for:

1. More children to be eligible for health insurance.
2. The end of lifetime and annual limits.
3. Give patients access to preventative services without cost sharing
4. Help seniors pay for prescriptions
5. Give tax credits to small businesses that must now insure employees (US Department of Health and Human Services, Understand the Law, accessed 2-04-2011).

In summary, while no administration has been able to affect huge reforms in health care, the small changes that have occurred have set the slow process of change in motion. I believe this is a positive start. Learning what I have about planning for community change in the second week's discussion, I can see how nurses could use the social planning approach to encourage the public to become involved with their legislature to influence reform (Maurer & Smith, 2009, p. 435).

2. Describe how you think politics is currently affecting public health? (10 points)

As explained in the previous question, change is slow in this country. I see positive changes in the messages our government is sending to the public. By the passage of health reforms such as the Affordable Care Act ((US Department of Health and Human Services, Understand the Law, accessed 2-04-2011) and the recent passing of the 9/11 First Responders Health Care Bill (Foley, 2011), our lawmakers are demonstrating they are hearing what the public is saying. Perhaps, even the reaction to this movie spurred a response to get this legislation passed. No longer will people have a limit on the health insurance and the 9/11 responders have access to a Victims Compensation Fund until 2016 (Foley, 2011, para.6).

The current administration is targeting the public with media messages to combat unhealthy lifestyles such as the Lets Move initiative started on February 9, 2010, when "President Obama signed a presidential memorandum to create the first-ever federal task force to provide 'optimal coordination' between private sector companies, not-for-profits, agencies within the government and other organizations to address the problem of childhood obesity.... The task force will be charged with coming up with a 'long-term action plan' after an extensive review of all federal nutrition programs" (Ferrin, 2010, "Battling Childhood Obesity", para.1). The Lets Move initiative's mission statement is "America's Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids" (letsmove.gov, n.d.). This is a positive example of directing preventative change toward future generations and the messages are cloaked in up to date and age appropriate media.

The recent passage of a Michigan no smoking law is another example of positive changes in public health (Michigan Department of Community Health, accessed February 5, 2011). This is an example of distributive justice (utilitarian system) where the benefits of the greater good outweigh the rights of the rights of the smoking population and a large step to improving public health.

These initiatives are constructive examples of the start of changes that will positively influence public health. Unfortunately, we are currently hindered by an economic recession that makes many leaders consider cost first. Fortunately, there is a trend in the belief that to control the cost of healthcare in the future, people need to be healthier.

3. Describe three significant impressions that have changed (strengthened or weakened) your previous feelings/opinions after viewing this movie. Give specific examples. (10 points)

1. There is very little social justice in this country, especially among the working poor. Some people struggle and work all their lives to lose everything because of an illness. Others lose everything while helping others. Reforms such as the Affordable Care Act ((US Department of Health and Human Services, Understand the Law, accessed 2-04-2011) and the recent passing of the 9/11 First Responders Health Care Bill (Foley, 2011) will end lifetime limits on insurance and provide coverage for the 9/11 responders. I believe one of the messages of the movie was to incite people to take action against some of the injustices and the passing of these two bills seem to show that maybe it worked.
2. I have always heard Michael Moore gives a biased viewpoint in his movies and after viewing Sicko, I believe that. It is his goal to shock people and in that, he succeeded. His picture of the Canadian healthcare system is slanted and sometimes untruthful. The Supreme Court of

Canada stated on a recent case involving the long wait for specialized health care in their country, "waiting lists for health care services have resulted in deaths, have increased the length of time that patients have to be in pain and have impaired patients ability to enjoy any real quality of life" (Steinbrook, 2006, p. 1662).

In his portrayal of the exemplary job Europe did in rebuilding after World War II, he neglects to mention that it was U.S. funding through the Marshall Plan that enabled them to do so (Rowntree, Lewis, Price, & Wykcoff, 2011, p. 69). Nor did he mention the reason many European governments are so supportive of their maternity patients in that many countries in Europe are experiencing a negative population growth (Rowntree, Lewis, Price, & Wykcoff, 2011, pp. 228-231). These incentives are meant to encourage people to reproduce.

3. I abhor the idea that healthcare industries in this country can be "for profit" institutions. This movie certainly reinforced that opinion. I find it hard to understand why the federal government cannot control insurance and drug companies. They should not be allowed to make huge profits from health-care. Moreover, maybe our costs are so much higher here because we do not have a system of healthcare prevention that looks at screening and pre-existing conditions as a way to manage the disease before it gets worse. The idea that an inhaler is five cents in Cuba and over 100 dollars here is outrageous. From personal experience, prior to having prescription coverage, my mother used to buy my spouse's blood pressure medication in Mexico and ship it to me. Same drug, same single dose package, at one-third the cost.

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