

Co-pay Conundrum

How I came to hate insurance but accepted living and dying with it

By Ron Verzuh

The insurance vultures are everywhere. A month before Christmas 2020, I paid several hundred dollars in “co-pays” for medical services. Canadians, I realize that “co-pay” is a foreign term to you, but for millions of Americans it is part of everyday life, death and possible bankruptcy.

To be fair, insurers usually pay a larger amount, yet not all health insurers are created equal. For example, my health insurance adviser told me that cataract removals were free under my plan. She neglected to mention that free meant a \$325 co-pay. There’s no escape; you get hit every time.

Health care insurance is a threat to household life savings. If you’re from Canada, as I am, you might never have heard of “deductibles.” You got sick, you saw a doctor, he or she fixed you. No insurance bill. A national health insurance plan paid for by everyone covered it. Socialism? You bet! Yet somehow the fear of “socialized medicine” stops Americans from getting rid of the vultures.

When politicians dare to propose a single-payer system, the insurance companies seek out a disgruntled Canadian to bad mouth Medicare, the public health insurer. I don’t know where they find them. Are they actors in it for a fast buck?

No true Canadian would bash the system that has cared for them from cradle to grave. No Canadian is ever refused health care because of inability to pay. No one is bankrupted. No one born and raised Canadian is ever without health insurance. It is a birthright and an obvious human right.

True, a lot of Americans earn their livelihoods working for insurance companies. It’s a massive self-perpetuating industry akin to the military-industrial complex. Clerks, bean counters, executives, they are cogs in the wheel of a company that thrives on death and destruction. They’re still good people, but couldn’t they find more productive work?

Hey, we’ve always had insurance going back to at least Hammurabi’s time. Hell, the pharaohs probably had some way of insuring against damage that thieves might cause to the pyramids. I wonder who paid for the loss of the Sphinx’s nose. Poor SOB likely got bricked in as a practical joke. Ha, ha. His nose is gone. If you happened to desecrate the grave of a king, the insurance agent would be onto you pronto.

That brings up a related insurance scam, one that many people have long favoured. Well, it’s not insurance in the usual sense. I’m talking about people who insure their lives on Sunday when they tithe at their local church, mosque or synagogue.

These can be places of collective refuge, solace and salvation. They aren’t supposed to discriminate. They perform important social services. They’re always instilling notions of faith, hope and charity. Then there’s the saving of souls.

Think of the poor insurance agent trying to pitch someone waiting for the Rapture. Why bother? Religious people have the best insurance of all and they don’t have to worry about monthly premiums or co-pays beyond dropping a few coins in a wooden plate.

I don’t expect to be among the 144,000 that get raptured up to Heaven, so I continue to purchase insurance for my car, my house, my health and my life. But I do it begrudgingly, knowing that it is a shameful business that I cannot escape.

Since birth, in fact, it has been part of my life. “You’ll want to insure the youngster’s life early,” the agent said to my parents, knowing that the company would reap the benefits. He or she knew that my parents were unlikely to cash in on those monthly premiums unless I were to die before them.

I guess the system rights itself in a way. When someone’s parents die, maybe they collect some insurance money. How much of it might depend on how they die. Did they insure themselves against the various forms of death that could occur? Did they have a Covid-19 clause in the policy? I bet not.

At the time of this writing, more than 300,000 Americans have died of Covid-19 and various virus-related causes. That kind of payout would bankrupt almost any company. But wait a minute. We’re not talking about any company. We are discussing the richest companies in the world and they keep getting richer without having to produce a thing. They profit from fear.

Car insurance is a bit better. At least if you have a fender-bender you can usually get some of your money back. Well, not really. Unless you have zero deductible, a costly improbability, you’ll likely have to pay for it out of pocket. So how to escape those monthly premiums that are in place to profit the car insurer? You could go a lifetime without having an accident, meaning the insurer’s profit margin is astronomical.

I bought a second-hand vehicle a few months ago. The other day I got a new wallet-sized card telling me I could save \$586 if I purchased “customized auto insurance.” Customized for who, the insurer or me? The fine print revealed that the insurer wouldn’t even cover towing. I had my answer.

House insurance is another department of the insurance company rip-off scheme. I have never had a house burned down. Nor do I live in an area directly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of climate change, although this year’s wild fires came close. I’ve never seen a tornado or tsunami. Sure an earthquake will eventually hit my area. I’ve felt tremors. Should I spend money on disaster insurance? What part of my grandchildren’s inheritance will I tap to pay for it?

When I had the roof redone a few years ago, Bert the roofer told me it was insured, but I hope I never need to file a claim. When the water main broke across the street last year, we thought the city utility’s insurance would cover the \$13,000 in water damages to our house. It didn’t. I’m not sure why not. Surely the utility’s policy covers “an act of God.” I guess that means lightning striking the house. But what made the water main break? Surely it was the water god.

So, yes, I hate insurance. It has long been a necessary evil that invades all aspects of modern life. There seems to be no way out; either co-pay or else.

Excuse me for a moment. I hear a knock at the front door. It’s either the JW’s or another insurance agent. Either way, I’m hooped.