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### **Look at other wealthy nations to tackle health care crisis**

*Last updated July 17, 2007 5:19 p.m. PT*

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GUEST COLUMNIST

It's hardly news that we have a health care crisis. To address it, many states are experimenting with expanding the existing system. But doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome is, of course, insane.

A better approach would be to look at the other 36 wealthy nations that are doing a better job at half the cost. All of them have lower infant mortality rates, longer life expectancies, and lower rates of asthma, cancer and diabetes. Why? Because they focus on making everyone healthier, not on whether private insurance or the government is in charge of financing health care. As it turns out, the right focus and the right programs lead to lower costs regardless of which financing model is used.

Making everyone as healthy as possible sounds good, but where do we start? Most successful programs are grounded in international human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and its implementing treaties, provide for a right to health care.

These laws spell out how to design, implement and evaluate health care programs that put the health of the individual first.

Health care that meets these international requirements provides for universal care. It provides for medical facilities and services that treat prevailing health conditions, and it requires that health care be offered without discrimination based upon any external factors, such as race, financial circumstances or insurance status.

International law also requires that everyone receive preventive care, coverage for pre-existing conditions, and it requires simplicity so that doctors can spend their time seeing patients, not filling out forms. Most important, under international law, doctors, not insurance companies, make decisions on medical treatment. All of this is possible at a cost significantly below what we pay -- and without the inequities of huge deductibles, co-pays and care restrictions and exclusions.

Our health care system needs to change at all levels. But, we can start right here in Seattle. Real change always comes from the bottom up, not the top down. And Seattle knows how to do it. We took a national leadership role by adopting the Kyoto Protocol. We should do it again.

Seattle, in conjunction with King County, also designs, funds and implements local health programs that target the most vulnerable among us. If the city adopts international standards, these programs will be less expensive and more effective. Providing better health care to these individuals means lower costs for everyone.

Finally, a recent University of Washington study showed that 44,000 jobs and \$1.8 billion in labor income are generated in the state every year from global health work. Seattle is at the center of this effort. One way to promote and expand it is to deepen our identification and connection with the international community. This can be done, in part, by incorporating the international health standards already in use around the world.

Seattle should not promote good health care policy only in other countries. Seattle should lead the domestic health care reform effort -- and set an example for the rest of the country as it did with the Kyoto Protocol -- by adopting international standards that provide for available, accessible, acceptable and high-quality health care for all. It's good policy. It will make a difference. And, it gives us the framework to turn from the current insanity toward real solutions to the health care crisis.

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