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## Candid Advice From a Health Care Visionary

Dr. Donald Berwick, who was [blocked by Republicans](#) from serving a full term as the administrator of the agency that runs Medicare and Medicaid, [has been speaking out](#). He makes a compelling case about the harm caused by partisan demagoguery and about the need for health care professionals to take the lead in implementing reforms.

In a recent speech, Dr. Berwick deplored attempts (almost entirely by Republicans) to discredit health care reform by using “outrageous rhetoric” about death panels that went “beyond cruelty” in subjecting older Americans “to groundless fear in the pure service of political agendas.” The real death panels, he suggested, are people who would allow insurers to take away coverage because people become sick and would reduce health benefits and shift costs to the needy who are least able to bear them.

Dr. Berwick still expressed great optimism that, building on health care reform, the American system will, indeed, be transformed to make access to health care “a basic human right.” He also found signs everywhere that hospital systems, specialty medical societies, patient safety programs, health insurers, employers, labor unions and various states are already taking steps to improve the quality and lower the cost of health care. He said there is still plenty of room for savings in a complex system where, he estimates, 20 percent to 30 percent of all health spending — or more than \$1 trillion a year — may be “waste” that does nothing to help patients.

He warned that, for the next three to five years, reformers will be judged by their success in reducing costs. In a separate interview, he fretted that changes promoted by the law might not produce results quickly enough to hold off critics. He urged health care professionals to lead the way in accelerating reforms. “We can do this — we who give care — and nobody else can.” His words are a strong call to professionals to do their part and a strong reminder of why reform must not be repealed.

