S., to the NEWS

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SOCIALIZED MEDICINE

"Those who warm themselves at the gates of Hell will never go there" is an old saying that warns us to contemplate the discomfort of a fiery eternity before we indulge in the tempting pleasures of the moment. The same lesson is just as applicable to warn us about the British experience with socialized medicine before we fall into similar folly in the United States.

The social planners of Britain's National Health Service follow ed the customar,y liberal pattern of setting impossible goals while irresponsibly underestimating the costs. It provides free he.alth care for everyone needing practically any kind of treatment. The annual cost is now running at more than 16 times the original estimate. The idea that spending more and more on health services will produce a healthier population needing less and less health care has been exposed as the will-o'-the-wisp it always was.

Britain's example enables us to identify the inevitable earmarks of a medical plan administered by the government: long waiting lists for treatment, the emigration of young doctors to other countries, and strikes of hospital personnel.

Doctors and nurses who first enthusiastically accepted the plan are now disenchanted and militantly organized to advance their own personal interests. >Their dedication has been poisoned by 20 years of chronic shortages of funds, obsolete buildings and equipment, escalating paperwork, and bureaucratic controls that override their

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professional judgment.

One of the interesting byproducts of Britain's experience is the impressive growth of private health insurance among all those who can possibly afford it. More than two million Britains and their families are now paying for private health insurance despite coverage by a comprehensive health service for which they are al ready heavily taxed.

'When services are provided free to the consumer, they are bound to be used wastefully. Demand stimulated by zero pricing can never be satisfied. Although the government puts an overall limit on the total budget, so long as the discipline of price is absent there is no real check on individual consumption.

The truly needy are squeezed out by those who insist on continued medical consultations and expensive drugs even when the doctor thinks there is nothing wrong. The least well-informed, the least socially competent, the least active, and particularly the elderly, are just as much at a disadvantage as they were under a free-enterprise system.

Doctors in London's largest hospitals have diagnosed the Na tional Health Service as a condition of "crisis," "collapse," and 11castastrophe. 11 The prognosis is clearly negative, and no one has any remedy to offer except a massive injection of more public funds which the British taxpayers cannot afford.

There are some people who have to make all their own mistakes, and there are those who are wise enough to profit from the mistakes of others. Let's hope that America will not duplicate Britain's medical mistake.

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