from Phyllis Schlafly July 22, 1993

WILL WE ALL PAY FOR "EXPLOSIVE DISORDER SYNDROME"?

The Clinton Administration announced this month that mental health care coverage will be part of the "standard benefits package" that all health plans will be required to offer under Hillary's "reform." We are told that this decision was made after eight weeks of "nightmares" trying to calculate the costs; but the nightmares will really begin if her plan ever goes into effect.

Under the health care plan now being drafted at the White House, universal mental health coverage (to be phased in over three years) will include 30 days of inpatient care per episode of mental illness each year (with an annual limit of 90 days); 20 psychotherapy sessions per year (with the patient paying 20 percent of the cost); prescription drugs; and no lifetime limit on mental health services. This is substantially broader than what most current health insurance plans offer.

Here is one anecdotal piece of evidence about how universal mental health coverage would work. A physician told me this true story, and I'm going to let him tell it in his own words.

"A male mechanic, who allegedly injured his wrist and developed pain, came to me as a patient. Even though treatment and, finally, surgery went well, he still complained of pain and said he could not work. I sent him to another surgeon for a second opinion, who reported back to me that he could find nothing wrong with the man.

"The next time I saw this patient, he told me that things were not going well. He said he had lost his job and his family. I asked why he lost his family, fearing some kind of tragedy.

"He told me he was 'beating' his family and they left him. I asked why he was beating his family.

"He told me that, following one of his outbursts, he was taken to a hospital emergency room where 'they' diagnosed him as having 'explosive disorder syndrome.' 'They' advised hospitalization for treatment of this problem, but told him it would be at his own expense since he no longer had health insurance. He declined hospitalization."

Under Hillary Clinton's mandated mental health coverage, this man will be able to check into the psychiatry wing of a hospital for a month of "treatment" and not have to worry about the cost. The bill will just be sent to the taxpayers.

Do you think the American people want to create this new welfare entitlement to care for those with "explosive disorder syndrome" and similar "illnesses"? This would reward misbehavior and punish those who work and pay taxes by forcing them to bear the costs.

My doctor friend is not alone in calling attention to the abuse that will surely be rampant in any national mental health coverage. Those who work with bona fide mental illness believe that broad definitions of mental illness are unjust to those who are truly mentally ill.

The definition of what is mental illness is basic to the whole idea of mental health coverage. In May, the Federal Government published a new definition in the Federal Register that is so broad that it will allow many who are simply misbehaving to compete for treatment funds with those who are seriously ill.

The new government regulation includes in the definition of mentally ill all those who have, or have had in the preceding year, a

diagnosable mental, behavioral or emotional disorder that interferes with one or more major activities in life, like dressing, eating or working. The definition for children says the disorder must interfere with activities like family relationships or school functions.

Laurie Flynn, a lobbyist for the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, which represents the families of those with serious mental illnesses, criticizes the new government regulations: "We are outraged. This appears to make almost any condition a serious mental illness. Common sense tells you this isn't true. Serious mental illnesses are schizophrenia, manic depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and other severe conditions; and the definitions should not include people who are merely adjusting to life stresses."

Miss Flynn has pointed up a real problem. My doctor friend's experience shows that some professionals are ready to diagnose wife and child beating as a mental illness called "explosive disorder syndrome," and then prescribe hospitalization.

Malingerers, wife beaters and child abusers are people who do bad things for which they should be punished. They should not be rewarded for their misbehavior by tender, loving care in the hospital at the taxpayers' expense.

There may be millions of people who have a hard time adjusting to life's challenges and who are mentally or emotionally distraught because they aren't getting along with their spouse or their employer. They will all be allowed to send the invoices for endless counseling and treatment to the taxpayers if the American people don't wake up and just say NO to Hillary Clinton's plan to include universal mental health coverage in the standard benefits package.