

Are You Angry Yet?

People are in trouble...and the government?

Clare Coleman, *President & CEO*

If you're like me, you have been alarmed by the number of "for sale" and "for rent" signs that have appeared in our area. Even people who have had some measure of security – who can consider themselves fortunate – are less certain about their finances, less certain about their ability to provide for their families and afford the cornerstones of the American dream: a home and a good education.

The uncertainty is affecting Planned Parenthood, too.



Planned Parenthood is part of a safety net that is meant for all of us, and many come in for care at some point in our lives. One in four American women have used Planned Parenthood services. Some of our patients seek us out as teenagers, when hormones are raging and parents seem remote, or count on us when living on a college student's budget.

But in the mid-Hudson Valley, our patients come to us from all areas and backgrounds. Fifty percent are working adults whose jobs don't include health

benefits, and about one-third have incomes so low that they receive Medicaid. That shiver of trepidation you may feel when you see the corner store's "going out of business" signs? Planned Parenthood's patients live with fear like that every day.

They live with the fear of layoffs, the car's check engine light coming on, the unexpected medical test or those painfully high oil bills. You may know that feeling – when you can't sleep at night even though you are exhausted.

Most of the people we serve aren't just passing through Planned Parenthood's care – they will rely on us for years. We don't turn them away because they are poor, and we don't refuse to continue their care if a bill goes unpaid.

We have worked in the community for nearly 75 years, and people count on us.

It may not be fashionable to be angry – I heard President Bush refer to the "angry left" this summer – but I'm angry now.

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Over the summer, Planned Parenthood learned that, once again, the federal government was using its bureaucratic power against us.

The federal government has decided that New York's safety net providers simply are paid too much for providing health care for the poor. It wants to cut our local Planned Parenthood's reimbursement by half. The fact is that we haven't received an increase in the payment we receive for Medicaid services in 16 years, and last year we had to cut our staff because of federal restrictions on health care for the poor.

That's not all. The federal government has also decided that, of all those who need a helping hand right now, it is employees and volunteers in health care organizations who oppose birth control and abortion that most need Washington's protection.

Really?

I read pages and pages of newly proposed regulations that could soon govern our agency's practices, and it is so far away from what's happening in our health centers. Simply put, the federal government is giving more attention to a political agenda than people's needs. It needs to be reminded of what truly needs attention.

In our health centers, people are worried that they won't be able to pay their bill, so they're calling ahead to ask for a diagnosis over the phone. Can they afford a test that will tell them if they have Chlamydia – which, untreated, can lead to infertility – or HIV?

In our health centers, patients shyly ask if the condoms are still free, and if they can come back for more. They want to do the right thing, but they can't afford to purchase protection.

In our health centers, where care is subsidized, patients are embarrassed because they can only settle part of their charges – in some cases, about 70% of their bill.

In our health centers, patients due for annual exams and renewed birth control prescriptions are coming in more slowly – they can't afford prevention, and are taking a risk that it'll be ok.

We are paying attention, and we know.

People come to Planned Parenthood to protect their sexual health and to prevent pregnancy and disease – that's responsible.

Planned Parenthood staff help our neighbors decide on the best, most effective and affordable methods of birth control and protection against disease for them – that's responsible.

Why shouldn't we be able to expect the same of our government in Washington? And if you're angry now – you should be.



Clare Coleman
President & CEO

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