

**Public Lecture by Dr. Lawrence J. Schneiderman  
"Ethics of Health Care Reform"**

**Wednesday, August 18, 2004 at 6:00 p.m. in the Garren Auditorium, Basic Science  
Building**

**Sponsored by the Sam & Rose Stein Institute for Research on Aging, UCSD**

The United States is almost alone among advanced democratic societies in failing to provide universal health care to its citizens. This failure is the despair of those who place health care alongside education, housing, food, and security as an ethical obligation of a nation to its citizens, and undermines the notion of the United States as a just society.

Polls show that dissatisfaction with what is generally acknowledged to be a fundamentally dysfunctional health care system has doubled in the last year. So far. Congress has done little more than sporadically rally behind a patchwork of bills; for example, providing prescription benefits to Medicare patients (but not to other sick patients equally in need of drugs), mandating days of hospitalization for obstetric patients (but not for other conditions requiring hospitalization), requiring insurance coverage for certain tests for certain categories of patients, like mammograms for women in their forties (despite evidence that such tests provide a poor return in health benefits and, in fact, cause many false-positive harms for women below the age of menopause). In other words, health care has become a struggle among interest groups rather than a rational distribution of beneficial treatments. Indeed, the word "rationing" is regarded as a kind of "third rail" word among politicians, one even more alarming than "universal."

In this lecture, we will address the following questions:

Can we solve the complex ethical dilemma of reconciling the obligations of society to its citizens (guaranteeing a decent minimum of health care to all) and the quest for individual freedom of choice by its citizens (allowing them to obtain additional private health insurance)?

Can we reconcile universal health care with the expectations of citizens in our capitalistic system?

Can we take into account the particularity of the American culture?

We will offer a conceptual approach that is consistent with the ethical perspectives of universality and individualism.