Medical Charities and Faith-Based Organizations:
A Positive Impact on Access to Healthcare

D. Todd Detar, D.O.
Health Policy Fellowship 2004

Abstract

*Charitable Choice*, part of the welfare reform act of 1996, allows faith-based organizations (FBOs) access to federal funding for social and health care programs. In 2003, the federal government awarded $1.17 billion to faith-based organizations – 8% of total funding for social programs. Charitable Choice has helped provide cost-effective services to many people. A Hudson Institute study showed $7.5 million was utilized to serve three thousand low-income citizens. In the DC area, 95% of African American congregations had outreach programs providing over a thousand community services to over a quarter-million clients. A University of Pennsylvania study found 85% of Philadelphia congregations provide critical social services, including health care clinics.

The church community, including Catholic Charities, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, the Interfaith Community Ministry Network, Points of Light Foundation, the Christian Legal Society and the Center for Public Justice supports FBO funding. The First Amendment fuels the opposition, which includes Americans United for Separation of Church and State, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Interfaith Alliance, American Atheists, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, American Jewish Committee (AJC), People for the American Way, Seventh Day Adventists, and the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination.

*Charitable Choice* allows faith-based initiatives to bolster the health care infrastructure and to support the safety net. Without this important safety net, communities would struggle to access health care and social services.