

Christian Science Committee on Publication for New York

51 East 42nd Street #600 New York NY 10017
212-661-3838 toll free - 888-661-6411 fax 212-986-8876
NYcompub@aol.com

**Testimony of Paul Hannesson at Public Hearing:
New York Partnership for Health**

I'm Paul Hannesson, Christian Science Committee on Publication for New York. I am grateful for the opportunity to present this testimony today.

I am here today to speak to you about -- spiritual healing--and how it can benefit the health of residents in New York. I will speak to you about how spiritual healing can be included in a cost-effective and efficient health care delivery system that meets the needs of all New Yorkers.

My request has 2 aspects:

- 1) Reimbursement for spiritual care; and
- 2) A brief discussion of patient protection for New York residents relying on spiritual care.

The goal of the Governor's health agenda, which serves as part of the basis for these public hearings, is to place "patients, not institutions, at the center of our health care system." A system of health care delivery that is truly accessible and universal meets the needs of *all* patients, not just those that choose to rely on one particular type of care. I'm here today to ask that you permit reimbursement for spiritual nonmedical care and treatment as part of any health care delivery system ultimately adopted as part of the New York Partnership for Health to ensure that these services will remain accessible to members of the public who desire them.

Christian Science involves the use of spiritual nonmedical care to treat physical injury and illness. It is a prayer-based method of thinking and living that is based upon the Bible and available to everyone. It is not related to Scientology. Other New York residents, not just members of the Christian Science Church, study Christian Science and apply its principles to challenges that they face in their daily lives. These individuals will often choose to rely on prayer as practiced in Christian Science in lieu of medical care to meet their health care needs. They choose to do this, not in opposition to medical approaches, but because they have found this form of healing to be effective. Spiritual care is patient centered care.

I'm a good example of a person who decides in favor of this type of care. I've been a practicing Christian Scientist for 50 years. During that time, I've experienced healings of, among other things, a learning disability, childhood illnesses, broken bones, ruptured muscles, family relationships and business challenges. These healings have taken place entirely through prayer.

Sometimes people who are relying on Christian Science for healing need spiritual support and/or physical care. When this happens, they can request the services of a Christian Science practitioner or a Christian Science nurse. It is these services that we request to be a part of a health care reimbursement system.

A Christian Science practitioner is someone who has demonstrated the ability to help others find health and healing through prayer. A Christian Science nurse is an experienced Christian Scientist who provides spiritual support and skilful physical care consistent with the theology of Christian Science. Christian Science nurses and Christian Science practitioners are compensated for their services. Neither Christian Science practitioners nor Christian Science nurses diagnose illness or provide any type of medical intervention or treatment. By definition, they provide services to individuals who have made the choice to rely on prayer instead of medical methods. Patients are completely free at any time to stop using the services of a Christian Science practitioner or a Christian Science nurse and to pursue other healing methods.

Coverage of spiritual care and treatment under health insurance plans is not a new concept. In fact, coverage of services in a "religious nonmedical health care institutions" (these are facilities where individuals who are relying on Christian Science for healing can go to receive Christian Science nursing care) has been available under Medicare and Medicaid since the inception of those programs. At least three of the Federal Employee Benefit Plans (health benefit plans that cover federal employees) -- GEHA, Mail Handlers, and SAMBA-- cover both Christian Science nursing care and Christian Science practitioner services. Fourteen (14) states have provisions in their State employee health insurance plans that cover this kind of care. Coverage for religious nonmedical care and treatment is also recognized for purposes of certain provisions of the Internal Revenue Code that authorize the establishment of Health Savings Accounts. For income tax purposes, Christian Science treatment and care have been interpreted as deductible Section 213(d) medical expenses.

In asking that spiritual care and treatment be included in any health care system that is adopted we're asking that the choice of patients who desire to utilize this kind of care be accommodated. We support health care reform that provides for patient safety and health through rigorous measures to ensure that services are provided appropriately and safely. For patients relying on spiritual care, this

means that there is also a need for an accommodation to medical criteria that might limit patients' ability to utilize spiritual care and treatment.

I have model language utilized by several other states that has opened a pathway for health plans or a health delivery system to be able to include spiritual care. This model language provides patient protection for residents that choose spiritual care.

Our society is reaching out for solutions to the problem of effective, affordable health care, and spiritual care and treatment can serve as one of the solutions to that problem. Please provide the public with access to these services as you continue your appointed task of creating a health care system that truly meets the needs of all of the citizens of this State. What's at stake is the public's ability to access the health care of their choice - and in the case of some New York residents - that is spiritual care.

Thanks very much for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hannesson,
Christian Science Committee on Publication for New York