

This week, concerns about swine flu have dominated the media and many government officials. While the American people should be made aware of infectious diseases and common sense preventative measures, much of the hysterical reaction from government only serves to remind us how detrimental to your health it can be when government plays doctor.

As a physician, I have yet to see any evidence that justifies the current level of alarm. Influenza typically kills around 36,000 people every year in this country and hospitalizes a couple hundred thousand. So far there are only a handful of confirmed deaths attributable to this strain, and most of those sickened have or will fully recover.

Every death is tragic, but I see no reason to deal with this flu outbreak any differently than we typically deal with any other flu season.

Instead, government in its infinite wisdom is performing even more invasive screening at airports, closing down schools and sporting events, and causing general panic.

We had a similar outbreak in 1976, with only 1 death

from the flu, but mandatory vaccinations killed at least 25 before the program was abandoned.

When government gets involved in healthcare decisions, the cure is so often worse than the illness. And yet, this administration will likely consolidate the government's power over your health with sweeping new reforms that are already being discussed in the Senate.

Government has not improved healthcare, and has not made it cheaper. Quite the opposite; costs have skyrocketed, and quality has gone down in many ways.

Gone are the days of the country doctor making house calls, or of voluntarily giving away medical services at charity hospitals.

The bureaucratization of healthcare these past 45 years has made things worse.

It saddens me as a doctor that physicians are less and less accountable to patients, but more and more accountable to government red tape, insurance companies and attorneys.

It seems so perverse to me that important medical decisions that will directly affect the lives of all or nearly all Americans are being hashed out behind closed doors in Washington rather than between doctors and patients.

There is perhaps nothing more valuable to a human being than his or her health, which is why I've always considered the practice of medicine so crucial to our well-being. Any intrusion by government into the privacy and trust between doctor and patient is detrimental to the art of medicine.

It distorts the whole dynamic of who the client really is when doctors must answer more to government or insurance companies than to their patients.

The best solutions to improving quality and lowering costs of

healthcare would be measures that put decisions back into the hands of patients and doctors, where they rightfully belong.

I have introduced HR 1495 The Comprehensive Healthcare Reform Act, which promotes health savings accounts and tax deductibility of healthcare costs as an important step in this direction.

The unfortunate reality of this recent health crisis, as with any crisis, is that it presents opportunities that the

unscrupulous will take advantage of, while the fearful become more compliant.