

## Rebecca Buck

---

**From:** Jack Mayer <jacklmayer33@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 08, 2018 11:31 AM  
**To:** Cheryl Jette; Rebecca Buck  
**Subject:** Primary Care - S53

Dear Cheryl Jette and Rebecca Buck,

I've been a Vermont pediatrician since 1976 and I have advocated for a single payer system since medical school. S53-the Universal Primary Care bill in Vermont is a modest first step towards universal coverage and I urge that my comments be submitted as testimony to the whole committee.

Here is a published essay I wrote about an uninsured child I cared for in my pediatric practice in Enosburg Falls (1976 – 1986). This is a true story.

### TWELVE BROWN EGGS

by Jack Mayer, MD

[Mayer, JL. "Twelve brown eggs," (essay) A Piece of My Mind - A Collection of Essays, Dan, B. B. and Young, R. K., editors. Random House, NY. 1988.]

Twelve brown eggs. Every Wednesday they're on my desk like a dozen inflated pennies. Mrs. Labelle leaves them as payment on her bill in my pediatric office on the Canadian border. She has little money but lots of chickens. In the northeast kingdom of Vermont the "economic recovery" doesn't mean much in terms of cold cash.

When I first came to this town ten years ago, filled with the romance of rural New England, I posted a sign inviting barter: "Times are tough. If you are having trouble paying your bill, I would be happy to discuss bartering goods or services." It wasn't long before Mrs. Boissonneau began crocheting a series of blankets, hats, and sweaters that far exceeded the number of beds, heads, and bodies in my family.

Anthony and Edward Delain seemed to pick up every croup, otitis and bronchitis plaguing the county, but Mr. Delain, an independent logger with neither health insurance nor savings account, didn't like to owe anyone money.

"I know I'm behind on my bill, Doc." He shifted weight uneasily and fingered his wool cap. "Saw your sign outside. I don't got much to trade but I cut wood."

"I could use firewood. I burn about four cords a year."

"This here's my busy season, but by October I could have four cord of nice maple, birch, and elm for you." He pronounced it Vermont-style, "el-um."

I reached out my hand and we shook. "Give me a call before you come so I can tell you where to unload it. And thanks."

I could see he had something else to say but he turned to go. He took two indecisive steps and changed his mind. "I ain't got cash to pay you and I feel real bad about it. But I cut good firewood. You won't be sorry. The boys'll want to come along. See where Dr. Jack lives. My old man, he used to tell me about

tradin' with old Doc Judd but I don't know of no doctors that trade anymore."

A month after Mr. Delain and the boys delivered my firewood, Brian Lussier's mother called me. It was a Monday morning in early October and the weekend on call had been beastly. The foliage had peaked a week before, and most of the leaves blew down in a blast of arctic air called the Alberta clipper. This feels like the coldest time in Vermont. The trees and ground are as bare as an uncovered sleeper and the night frosts bring memories of last winter. People are reluctant to put on their winter coats, hanging onto fall jackets like amulets.

The first viral epidemic filled my waiting room, and I was late because of an unscheduled C-section at the hospital 20 miles away. Mrs. Lussier didn't come very often and Brian was still behind on his shots. Jan handed me the phone as I ushered the noisy Shurtleff clan into my office.

"Hello, Mrs. Lussier? This is Dr. Mayer. What's up?"

"It's Brian. He's had a fever since last Wednesday and the Tylenol don't help. I thought he'd be better by now but he looks bad to me. Must be his ears. I was wonderin' if you could call the Rexall and give him some of that pink penicillin. It fixed him up in good shape last time."

"Mrs. Lussier, I can't prescribe an antibiotic over the phone. And it sounds like I need to see him. Is he drinking fluids?"

"Well, not real good. He just lays around and takes a sip. I think he's got a sore throat. We all been sick."

"I think you'd better bring him in this morning. Do you have transportation?"

"I could get my husband to come back from the pulp mill. But," she paused and her voice fell, "we don't have no insurance. I can't pay you."

"Doesn't matter. You pay when you can. Brian needs to be seen."

"I don't know. My husband don't like to run up bills."

"Mrs. Lussier, please. He needs to be seen."

Twenty-month-old Brian was lethargic. He sat mute and dull-eyed in his mother's lap, mouth hanging open, limbs unmoving. His temperature was 105 and his neck was stiff. When I told his mother that he might have meningitis and would need to be in the hospital, she sighed deeply and picked at her frayed coat.

"I know you're worried about Brian." I pushed a box of Kleenex to her. "He needs blood tests and a spinal tap. If he has meningitis he'll have to go to Burlington, to the medical center. He'll get the best care."

"I'll have to talk with my husband. He's waitin' in the car."

"Mrs. Lussier." It was hard to ask this question, but I had to know. "Did you wait because of the money?"

She nodded and took another tissue.

"Is that why he's behind on his shots?"

She nodded again.

Brian survived his H. influenza meningitis but he's in a special education class. Mrs. Lussier puts \$5 toward her bill every month without fail. One day I saw her looking wistfully at my barter sign. She buys her own eggs. Her house is cold in winter.

~

~

~

~

We already have government financed single payer in the U.S. – Medicare and Medicaid. Both work very well and provide excellent care for all who are eligible.

Obamacare still depends on the obsolete medical insurance industry, an intermediary between providers and patients that provides not one iota of care.

A Medicare-for-All, single payer system, at least for primary care, would be equitable, simpler, less expensive, and provide excellent care for everyone. In our hearts we all know this is the right thing to do.

I believe that we will eventually have a single payer, universal health care system, but until we get there, my patients and millions of others will suffer needlessly.

Winston Churchill wittingly observed, “You can always count on Americans to do the right thing – after they've tried everything else.”

Thank you for your attention,

My best,  
Jack Mayer, MD, MPH  
Middlebury, VT