My Fee-for-Service Coiffure

By Sharon Lewin

I went to my hairdresser the other day. I’m a doctor on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and my hairdresser is my patient. He asked me whether I was in a certain managed-care network, and I said I was thinking of dropping out of all of them.

He said, “What will I do?” and I said, “You’ll have to pay me like I pay you.” It occurred to me that my haircuts cost twice as much as much as his visits to me.

I always ask new managed-care patients who referred them to me. Sometimes they say, “I got your name out of the managed-care directory.” I find myself asking them, “Would you choose a hairdresser from the Yellow Pages?”

The answer, invariably, is: “No! Who knows what I’d end up with?”

Something is wrong with this picture. For the sake of fairness in life, I think this country needs Managed Hair.

Hairdressers and clients would join H.M.O.’s (hair maintenance organizations). Clients would pay a small co-pay at each visit. Hairdressers would bill the H.M.O.’s and then wait (indefinitely) for payment.

Because of reduced fee for service, hairdressers would have less time to spend with each client.

People with hair emergencies would have an 800 number to call for permission to see their stylist. These emergencies would be ranked in severity. For example, waking up one morning with no hair at all would be the most critical, followed by various sorts of bad hair days. If a client needed a major procedure (cut and color, let’s say), this would have to be pre-approved by a well-paid H.M.O. employee.

Sure, this would be a radical change, but these are desperate times. After all, the cost of hair care in this country is very high, and everyone has the right to good hair.

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