

Robert F. Graboyes | What is health economics?

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Frequent question from students: *“Dr. Graboyes, what is health economics?”* All resources are scarce, so people must make choices. Some choices affect our health. Health economics explores scarcity, choices, and the impacts on health. Here are 50 questions that health economists explore. We touch these and many other questions during my health economics courses:

- 1) How can we provide better care to more people at lower cost year after year?
- 2) Which is more important to health: insurance market design or delivery system innovation?
- 3) How do we decide which of three patients should get a transplantable kidney?
- 4) Which buys the most health? \$1,000,000 on health care, education, or the environment?
- 5) In what ways do laws and regulations impede technological innovation?
- 6) How is a one-story house a substitute for a hip replacement?
- 7) How much do we spend on health care?
- 8) Why has the average human lifespan risen from 30 to around 80?
- 9) What incentives induce a heroin addict to stay clean?
- 10) Which is more valuable: a human life today or two lives ten years from now?
- 11) Do mandatory seat belt laws save lives?
- 12) How do we define an improvement in health?
- 13) Why are there more obese people today than previously?
- 14) What are the maximum and minimum costs of health insurance?
- 15) How much should the U.S. spend on Medicare?
- 16) Are we spending too much on health care?
- 17) How do doctors' interests diverge from patients' interests?
- 18) What is the cost of a medical education?
- 19) Why do health care costs rise so rapidly?
- 20) Why does insurance make us take risks?
- 21) Why do some people lack health insurance?
- 22) How does U.S. health care stack up against other countries' health care?
- 23) Do physicians need licenses?
- 24) When should the government involve itself in health care?
- 25) Why do we get health insurance from our employers?
- 26) Why is it inescapable that we place a dollar value on human life?
- 27) What is the danger of placing a dollar value on human life?
- 28) Do I place a higher or lower value on your life than you do?
- 29) Are profits unusually high in the pharmaceutical industry?
- 30) What is the ideal length of time for the FDA to review the safety of a drug?
- 31) Should health insurance cover gym memberships?
- 32) Should blood banks be allowed to pay money for blood donations?
- 33) Does cigarette advertising increase the number of smokers?
- 34) Are smoking-related deaths good or bad for the finances of state governments?
- 35) Should insurance companies be allowed to use genetic information on subscribers?
- 36) Can doctors conjure up demand for medical services?
- 37) Is Canadian health care really cheaper than U.S. health care?
- 38) What's the best way to measure the quality of a hospital?
- 39) Will a rise in the price of insulin reduce the amount that diabetics purchase?
- 40) Can consumers competently judge the quality of medical care?
- 41) Will a clean needle program increase the incidence of intravenous drug use?
- 42) How much do malpractice and malpractice insurance add to the cost of health care?
- 43) When you go to buy insurance, how are you like a used car dealer?
- 44) What are Medicare and Medicaid?
- 45) What impact do foreign medical graduates have on doctors' salaries?
- 46) Why was medicine a disrespected, low-paid profession until the early 20th Century?
- 47) How did medicine become a respected, well-paid profession in the 20th Century?
- 48) Will medicine become a less-respected, lower-paid profession in the 21st Century?
- 49) When you get an x-ray in Virginia, how come the radiologist reading it is in India?

- 50) Is there a quick, simple, affordable way that Congress and/or the President can fix most of the problems in the American health care system?

I try to answer questions 1-49 in class. I can answer question 50 here:

“No.”