

WANT TO LOWER YOUR HEALTH CARE COSTS? VOLUNTEER!

With the approach of day 100, I'm terribly anxious about what Hillary's panel will recommend as a cure for our health care system. While waiting, though, I came up with one way to vaccinate individuals against the scourge of rising health care costs. After all, we live in a society that ails at a cost approaching one trillion dollars every year. My treatment plan calls for all of us to maintain our own health by lending a helping hand.

Not only is it politically correct and socially responsible, but volunteer work has actually been found to help people live longer, with less need for medical intervention. Volunteering can't help but reduce

an individual's health care costs!

There's plenty of evidence to support the health benefits of serving others. One study, led by epidemiologist James House of the University of Michigan, found that performing volunteer work at least once a week dramatically increases life expectancy. Other scientists reason that social involvement through helping other people may lower your stress level and help you stave off infection.

An abundance of organizations and agencies could use your help. Clearly, there are more volunteer jobs than can be performed by the 80 million Americans who donate their services each year.

As one of those 80 million, I advise you to find an organization or a cause that you strongly believe in, whose mission is compatible with your own ideals. Doing so enables you to express humanistic values, makes you feel better about yourself and allows you to continue your personal development.

On a practical level, volunteer work can add skills to your repertoire and maybe lead to a new job or career. You'll have fun. And you're sure to make new friends.

Find something to do that you really enjoy. Many people reading this will feel best about contributing their communications talents. Others will want to make a clean break from what they do from 8 to 5.

If you've always had a soft spot for animals, contact the director of volunteers at the San Francisco Zoo, the Academy of Sciences, Marine World Africa USA or the Marine Mammal Center. If you have

fond memories of being a teaching assistant, sign up to tutor through Project Read or through your local school district. Or, if yours is a gregarious personality, why not give time to a local rehabilitation facility, serve at St. Anthony's Dining Room or spend a few hours behind the counter at the San Francisco Visitor Information Center?

Where to get more ideas? You could start with the Volunteer Center of the Bay Area at 1-800-227-3123. Or look in the Yellow Pages under Social Service Organizations.

I expect to read reams of recommendations for health care reform in the coming months. But as National Volunteer Week (April 18 – 24) nears, I recommend that you go out and serve others at least once a week. Your body — and your billfold — will thank you for it.

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