

If you believe quality healthcare is a human right, then the recommendations of Oliver Wyman, a healthcare consulting group, should make you shudder. As a fourth generation Vermonter practicing medicine for thirty years in the Northeast Kingdom I am deeply concerned on what will happen to our “brave little state” if we adopt these recommendations. A brief history of how Dr. Bruce Hamory of Oliver Wyman came to his draconian recommendations on how to make healthcare viable in Vermont follows.

Due to the continual escalation of medical care costs in Vermont, the legislators passed Act 167 in 2022. The first paragraph of Act 167 reads as follows: The Green Mountain Care Board, in collaboration with the Director of Health Care Reform in the Agency of Human Services, shall develop and conduct a data-informed, patient focused, community inclusive engagement process for Vermont’s hospitals to reduce inefficiencies, lower costs, improve population health outcomes, reduce health inequities, and increase access to essential services while maintaining sufficient capacity for emergency management.

The legislators did not ask the GMCB to hire a consultant to conduct the requests put forth in Act 167. The GMCB decided to hire a healthcare consultant to give them direction.

Dr. Hamory took about a year to gather data and hear from members of the community about the state of healthcare in Vermont. He stated he spoke to over one thousand Vermonters in this process. He spoke to healthcare providers. He spoke to hospital administrators. Many people heard him speak.

After months of gathering data and feedback he presented his preliminary recommendations to communities. Before doing this, he met with hospital leaders and board members. Many of his preliminary recommendations were challenged during these meetings. His wrong and misused data was pointed out. He seemed to acquiesce and accept the logic and data presented to him during these meetings. On 9/19/24 he presented his 140 pages of recommendations. The bait and switch were revealed. As Seven Days stated a few months ago, “paging doctor obvious,” his observations and statements about housing and transportation did not take a multimillion-dollar consultant to figure out. He stated Vermont needs more primary care providers. Wow, really??? No one saw that coming. Again, millions of dollars for this advice. The low hanging fruit is plentiful in his report.

Dr. Hamory’s biases based on his experience in central Pennsylvania are alarming. Due to his lack of understanding of Vermont values and the objectives put forth in Act 167 he discriminates against Vermonters’ right to healthcare based on their income and where they choose to live. He seems oblivious to the realities of living in rural Vermont. When visiting our communities he spoke to us. He did not listen to us. He failed to comprehend difficulties the most vulnerable members of our community face when trying to get medical care. He failed to realize the important role community hospitals play in making the difference between quality medical care versus no care at all. Dr. Hamory did not listen. He cherry picked his data and used incomplete and false data to make draconian recommendations to “fix” Vermont’s healthcare. One of his most disastrous recommendations is to close four of Vermont’s community hospitals, one of these serving the most isolated and economically depressed area of the state.

Act 167 tasks the GMCB to improve population health outcomes, reduce health inequities and increase access to essential services. It doesn’t take a brain surgeon to realize eliminating well-functioning community hospitals and converting them into 16hr urgent care clinics will do the complete opposite of what Act 167 dictates. Dr. Hamory suggests if you live in rural Vermont, you do not have a right to

medical care. He has made it clear in his proposals that if one chooses to live in the most rural parts of the Northeast Kingdom, you are not entitled to have your medical needs met locally.

Dr. Hamory makes these recommendations on the pretense our community hospitals are non-viable institutions and heading toward economic ruin. He comes to this conclusion because he did not listen and used completely false and inaccurate data. I would hope if one were going to make recommendations that put a dagger not only through the medical institutions of a community, but also the economic lifeblood of a region that they would have at least used complete and accurate data. Not incomplete, static, and false data.

There is no doubt Vermont's healthcare system is sick. However, instead of hiring a consultant who does not understand Vermont values and priorities to fix our healthcare system we should be looking within for solutions. The professionals that work tirelessly to keep our citizens healthy, the administrators committed to maintaining vibrant local institutions for healthcare, the local business folks that provide jobs and pay for the healthcare of their employees. These are some of the talented individuals we have right under our noses who understand Vermont values and have the experience and ingenuity to produce solutions to right the healthcare system. Let's trust Vermonters. Not multimillion dollar lazy, unimaginative, and cowardly consultants.

The recommendations Dr. Hamory put forth for Vermonters and their healthcare are harmful and irresponsible. Fortunately, they are only recommendations. I hope our legislators listen to the outcry of their constituents regarding these recommendations and demand better from the Green Mountain Care Board. It is clear millions of dollars have been wasted.

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