

## National Health Insurance debate: SASA 2010

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**“There is nothing more uncommon than common sense.”**

Frank Lloyd Wright, 1867 – 1959

**“We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we now know that it is bad economics.”**

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1882 – 1945

**“In the present state of the world it is difficult not to write satire.”**

Juvenal, AD 60 – 140

*“With sufficient incentive to alter the status quo plus a little luck, anaesthesiologists’ protected status can be altered by the stroke of a pen. Cost, protectionism, and unmet needs provide the incentive for change”*

Warren Sandberg.

(Sandberg WS. Barbarians at the gate. *Anesth Analg* 2009;109(3): 695-9.)

Besides the obvious economic implications, any debate on national health must centre on who has the authority, who carries the responsibility and who should be accountable. Establishing the relationship between authority and responsibility is of vital importance for organising any system. Authority and responsibility are twinned with accountability and reliability. You cannot have authority without responsibility, and responsibility must be paired with authority. One definition of “authority” could be “the right, in a position, to exercise discretion in making decisions affecting others”. A definition of “responsibility”

could be “the obligation of a subordinate to whom a duty has been assigned to perform”.

If authority is greater than responsibility, then this could result in autocratic behaviour.

If responsibility is greater than authority, then this could result in frustration.

While responsibility unhinged from authority creates hapless victims, authority without responsibility creates monsters. People who can make decisions for which they can never be held accountable have the potential to be incredibly destructive in whatever environment they find themselves in.

National health needs serious debate, with those who are currently responsible for providing health care needing to demonstrate why they should have the authority to do so as well.