

‘New York Times’ Mocks Christians Who ‘Just Trust God’ With Health Care Sharing

A Jan. 2 *New York Times* story by Reed Abelson about health care sharing organizations used Samaritan Ministries International members Mark and Caroline Collie for the opening of the piece. It had a catchy headline: “It Looks Like Health Insurance, but It’s Not. ‘Just Trust God,’ Buyers Are Told.” Unfortunately, the article misrepresented both the Collies’ story and Samaritan Ministries, and both the Collies and Samaritan Ministries have requested a correction.

Mark Collie gave us permission to post his email to the *Times* on our website. He describes his family’s disappointment in the politicization of their very personal story. In response, author Abelson stated she stands by the accuracy of her reporting. It is disheartening that the *Times* thinks it knows the Collies’ story better than the Collies do.

Although Samaritan Ministries has been sharing financial assistance and spiritual and emotional support among our members for more than 25 years, we recognize that the concept of health care sharing may be new to many and there may be misunderstandings, including how health care sharing works. As we are not insurance, our terminology and method of directly sharing between families can understandably raise sincere questions, and we thank reporter Abelson and many others who are engaging in the conversation.

At its core, health care sharing is simply a community of Christians trying to apply their faith to their health care choices—and doing so with transparency, sustainable practices and sound governance. The difference in terminology and approach in no way means that participating members do not

receive financial assistance.

“Just trust God”—the *Times* headline quote taken out of context and separated from the fact that last year Samaritan members shared more than \$300 million directly from one Christian family to another—can be construed derogatorily, as a sign of naivete or lack of controls. *But Samaritan Ministries’ trust in God is faith in action; we back up our heartfelt prayers and encouragement with money and sound governance, not just words.*

As the *Times* article mentions, allegations of improper practices by other, newer health care sharing organizations have arisen, which, unfortunately, are casting a shadow on longstanding sharing organizations, such as ourselves, that do not utilize these alleged practices. *Samaritan Ministries is grateful these allegations are being reviewed by the media and government officials, and we are committed to working with all parties for the safeguarding of members and the health of the broader health care sharing community.*

This is one reason why we publicly provide our “Health Care Sharing Best Practices.” With our 25-year history, and our commitment to uphold our biblical ethics, honor our members and maintain the highest standards for sustainable governance and practice, we established and abide by these best practices.

Fidelity to these practices is representative of our commitment to our members. We take our responsibility very seriously to wisely and faithfully manage this ministry and the families represented, as we believe that, beyond giving an account to humans, we will give an account of our management to God. Therefore, these sound practices are core to our ministry and non-negotiable.

Some may question why a faith-based, community approach is so important to us. We believe health care should not be reduced

to a transaction. Contrary to the *Times* headline, Samaritan members are not “buyers” of a *commodity*. They’re members of a *community*. Samaritan members are not numbers. Or accounts. Or a market to grow. They’re human beings who are deeply loved by Jesus Christ, and who are worthy of being loved and cared for by the family of God.

Transactional, commodity-based health care is dehumanizing. Where did we lose the sense of humanity in the healing arts, of connecting with our fellow human beings who are going through suffering and are seeking comfort, relief and healing with the support of a community? If we strip health care down to a commoditized, financial transaction, should we be surprised when we feel alone, when we have to fight to get care, when organizational practices and billing to patients lack transparency, and when we get the nagging feeling that we’re simply part of a system with an agenda, where others know our story better than we do?

We believe our members’ stories matter. That we’re together on a journey of both healing and faith. And we believe that if we work together with all who are willing—whether a provider, the media, government or educators—day after day we can make health care just a little bit better.

Health care sharing is not for everyone, and even those who desire to participate in health care sharing may find a better fit with another ministry. But that’s OK. Health care solutions are not one-size-fits-all. The challenges are too complex and multifaceted and the needs and situations of the patients too personal to be reduced to one approach. We need “all hands on deck.”

To that end, we extend an open hand to all who are working for the good of the patient and are willing to solve complex problems together. We may not have the same philosophies or methods, but we will respect you and seek the common good—not just with our words of faith, but with faith in action. {eo}

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