

thinking **out loud**

Exchange

Plans continue for a Sing Sing prison museum up the river in Ossining. Will tourists want to hear about the famous criminals who did time there, not to mention those who were executed? Could have a ghoulish appeal, like a true-crime version of Sleepy Hollow on Halloween.

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COMMUNITY VIEW

Improve Obamacare, don't risk replacing it



BRUCE A CRIPPEN/USA TODAY

A woman is escorted down a hallway by a nurse in Mason, Ohio.

Nurses see toll from poverty, poor health-care access

MARIE TRUGLIO-LONDRIGAN AND SANDRA B. LEWENSON

Many Americans now have access to health care for the first time. For example, millennials can remain on their parents' health plans until they are 26, and those with pre-existing conditions can purchase new plans. When we hear presidential candidates say that they will do away with the Affordable Care Act, either removing it entirely or replacing it, we must ask: what would the consequences be for the American people? Arguments about whether the Affordable Care Act is doing too much or too little need to be examined by many, particularly those on the front lines — the nursing profession.

Nurses make up the largest group of health care providers in the nation and the most trusted profession; we must have a voice in this discussion. We have the skill set to meaningfully address what needs to be done and how to make services more accessible, available, affordable, and acceptable to every American.

We know from our experience as public health nurses that the Affordable Care Act is not perfect. But to deconstruct it in the hopes of building something better would be a mistake. If our

goal is a healthy society and health for all Americans, then let's build on what we have. We need our presidential candidates and the public to join nurses in working toward solutions in ways that do not place the American people at risk.

Public health nurses study and work in settings where we see first-hand what poverty and lack of health care can do to individuals, families, and communities. We must move towards a culture of health where everyone has the opportunity to make decisions about health and have access to care.

Health care involves more than provider/patient point of service, but all of primary health care. An example is the current crisis in Flint, Michigan, where the water system has been so compromised by the presence of lead that it has jeopardized health for so many. We must reflect upon other determinants of health such as: when a crumbling infrastructure potentially endangers the safety of Americans driving home from work; when an aging population struggles to live within their home communities; when chronic illness and disability prevent many Americans from achieving quality of life; and when children and are faced with hunger, violence, and racial disparities try to learn in schools. This is the context within which

many Americans struggle to make decisions about health care options.

From their early history, public health nurses have played a key role in providing primary health care by bringing care into urban and rural settings. Nursing leader Lillian Wald opened the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side of New York City to bring a culture of health to the city's immigrant population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In rural America, the American Red Cross Town and Country, established in 1912, brought educated public health nurses to geographically remote areas. These early public health nurses provided health education and made themselves available to the communities they served. The needs of Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries still resonate today.

Whether you are for or against the Affordable Care Act, consider this: what part of health care do you not want for your family, friends, or communities? And what are you willing to risk?

The writers are professors at Pace University's College of Health Professions and co-authors of the book, "Practicing Primary Health Care in Nursing: Caring for Populations."