

Written by Allan Besselink
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<p><a title="MLK's house"

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Some twenty-odd years ago, I stood outside the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, reflecting on the tragic events of April 4, 1968. I have looked out over the National Mall and Reflecting Pool from the Lincoln Memorial, imagining what it must have looked like on August 28, 1963. Fifty-two years later, his words still have the power to bring me to tears.</p>

<p>Today, we remember and honor Martin Luther King, Jr. and his fight for civil rights and for freedom.</p>

<p>Many of us think of ♦civil rights♦ in terms of equality. But it is so much more than that for all of us, regardless of race or gender. In Texas, we hear a lot about property rights and the right to bear arms. But perhaps more importantly are those unalienable rights, those rights that we all share and the foundation upon which we all live, as noted in the Declaration of Independence.</p>

<p>Have you considered your health as one of those civil rights?</p>

<p>It might not be an obvious link at first. Step back for a moment and consider the

following.</p>

<p>There is no better place to start than the Declaration of Independence:</p>

<p>♦We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.♦</p>

<p>Follow that up with the Bill of Rights, and more specifically, the Ninth Amendment:</p>

<p>♦The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the

people.♦</p>

<p>Just to clarify, the Bill Of Rights Institute notes ♦</p>

<p>♦The Ninth Amendment implicitly refers to natural rights, which the Founders believed all people were born with as the gift of God or nature.♦</p>

<p>And this brings me to health. </p>

<p>Health is an integral part of ♦life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness♦.

Health is also an issue of self-ownership, perhaps one of the most important of the ♦natural

rights♦ of the Ninth Amendment. We talk of patient-centered care and the inherent values

contained within. We talk of informed decision-making and patient empowerment.</p>

<p>All good stuff, indeed. All principles that we often take for granted.</p>

<p>But legislators have created arbitrary limits to a patient♦s freedom of choice in which a patient cannot choose their

health care provider freely and of their own volition.</p>

<p>In Texas as in most states in the United States, you simply don♦t have the freedom to choose ANY provider for your own health

care based on your own informed decision-making about your health. When it requires the legal

permission of a third party - one who may or may not have a vested interest in your choice -

then it♦s no longer a right.</p>

<p>You can♦t go halfway on ♦unalienable rights♦. You have them or you don♦t. Period.</p>

<p>♦Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.♦ (MLK)</p>

<p>On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a day in which we celebrate a man that had such a profound impact on civil rights, let us remember the

most elemental, unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. While we♦re at

it, how about the natural right of self ownership along the way? That extends to making choices

about your own health and health care.</p>

<p>With this in mind, I challenge legislators nationwide - and specifically, within my home state of Texas - to put patients and their

unalienable rights first and foremost.</p>

<p>♦The time is always right to do what is right.♦ (MLK)</p>

<p>Life is health. Self-ownership is paramount. A patient♦s right to choose is a constitutional issue, not a lobbyist issue. Let us not forget King - not just for

equality, but for what he represents to all of our civil rights ♦ including our health.</p>

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