

# Prescription for reform

Doctor writes book on health care system

By Jennifer Schmidt  
Leader-Telegram staff

John Hunsinger, a small-business owner from Chetek, watched helplessly as his health insurance premium rose year after year.

"It had gone up 15, 20, 25 percent every year since we got it back in 1992," said Hunsinger, owner of the 10-employee business Romanzia Window Covering Specialties. "All of those years we pared back the coverage a little bit to try to get it so it wasn't such a big hit — but it was."

When his company premium soared an unbearable 34 percent last year, Hunsinger had no choice but to cancel the policy.

"It got so that the health insurance premium was really more than we made that year, so we had to call it quits," Hunsinger said. "It wasn't stopping or slowing down. It was accelerating."

In his new book "Health Security America: Fixing the Health Care Crisis," Dr. Fred Bannister cites Hunsinger's struggles as an example of the country's broken health care system. Intertwining personal examples with hard facts, the 104-page

book outlines the retired family physician's plan for reforming America's health care system. Bannister said the goal of the book — available for \$15.95 online, at Borders and at several other locations in west-central Wisconsin — is to provide a roadmap to health security for every American.

"We have the finest medical care in the world in this country — as long as

you have good enough insurance to pay for it or money in your checkbook," said Bannister, who practiced medicine for 40 years in Chetek.

He doesn't blame physicians, insurance companies or even the government for the unsettling state of the nation's health care system. Although critical of large medical corporations and their wasteful spending habits, Bannister said his main motivation is encouraging the health care industry to change its ways.

"They all work under these rules, and

## Upcoming Appearances

Dr. Fred Bannister will talk about his book and sign copies at the following dates and times:

■ 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday at Book World, 105 N. Main St., Rice Lake.

■ 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday at Borders, 4030 Commonwealth Ave.

■ 7 p.m. Monday, May 15, at Calhoun Memorial Library, 321 Moore St., Chetek.

these rules have to be changed," he said, referring to the corporate mantra that values profits and bottom lines above all else.

It galls him to see 46 million Americans lacking health insurance. He especially feels for the children included in the statistic. "Kids in this country are every one of our kids," he said.

That's why one of his plan's three mandates includes free health insurance for Americans through their first 18 years. (Read more on the mandates, and excerpts from some of his chapters, at [www.healthsecurityamerica.com](http://www.healthsecurityamerica.com).)

He predicts his citizen-run plan, known as Health Security America, or HSA, will reduce insurance premiums, eliminate inefficiencies and do away with unnecessary practices. But this is only if patients and providers take more responsibility and follow eight bylaws, which address everything from non-compete clauses to standardized billing.

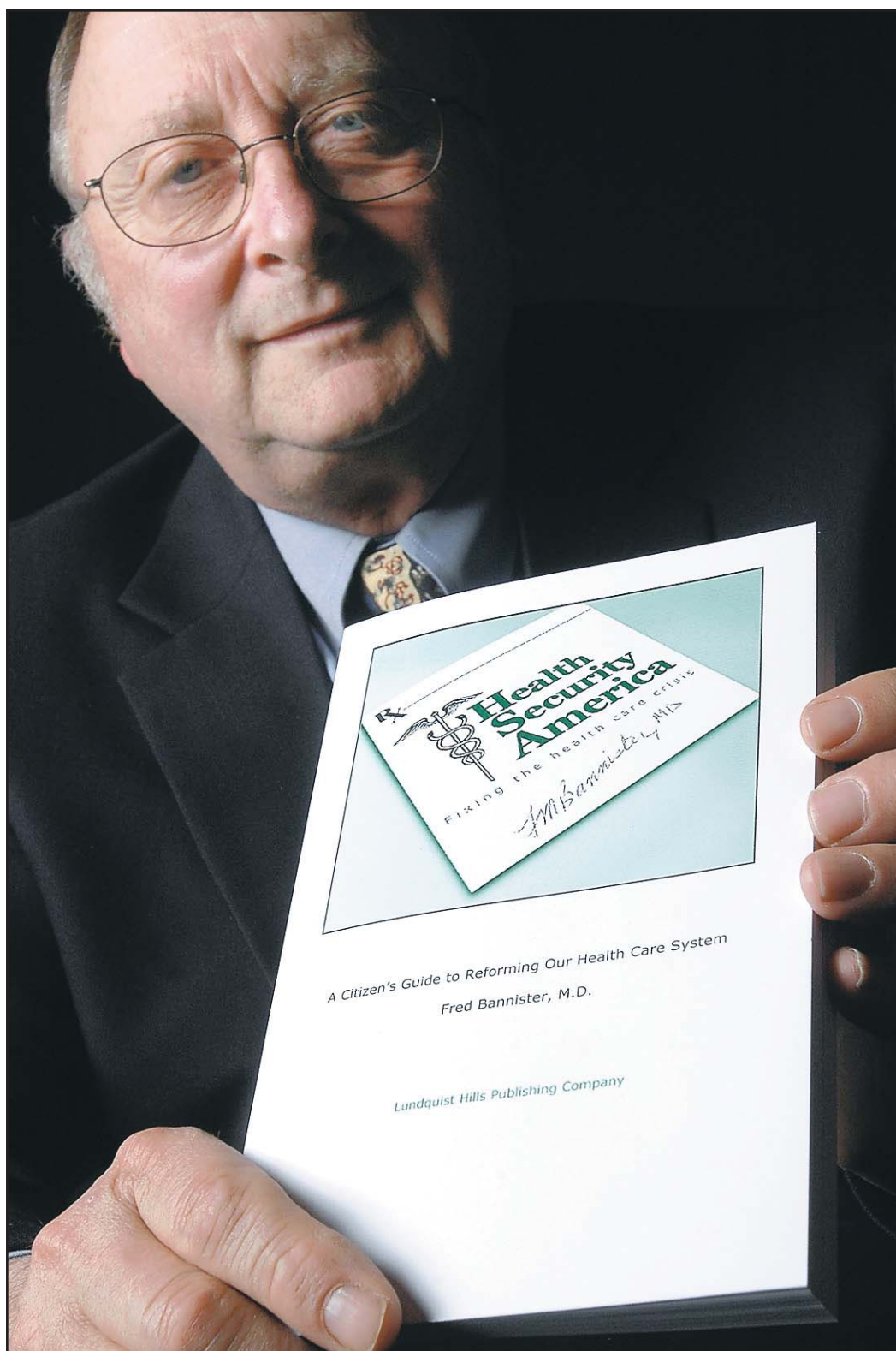
What's more, the general public and those it selects as its representatives call the shots. Should abortions be covered? Are generic drugs allowed over pricier brand name versions? The people will decide.

It should be noted that Bannister is not poised to profit from the book. Any profits will go toward advancing a health-secure America, he said.

"I'm just trying to help," he said.

Beth Ager of Chetek, a former patient of Bannister's, edited the book, which she deems "a very credible plan that would certainly move the situation forward."

"I think that whether or not you agree or disagree with Dr. Bannister's ideas, this is an excellent coalition that he's forming," Ager said. "I think what we need to do is get behind a well thought out plan. I think it's reaching the boiling point with most people."



Staff photo by Shane Opatz

Dr. Fred Bannister, a retired physician from Chetek, recently wrote a book about health care reform. In "Health Security America: Fixing the

Health Care Crisis," Bannister compares today's system with what the practice and funding of medicine used to be like.

## About the Author

Dr. Fred Bannister of Chetek started a solo family practice in the Barron County community in 1965.

During the first 13 years of his practice, Bannister helped lead an enlarging group of physicians as a member and president of the board of directors that in 1978 numbered nine physicians and 13 employees, covering the communities of Barron, Chetek and Cameron.

He led his group into a merger with

Midelfort Clinic in 1978.

Bannister served for eight years on the clinic's board of directors, resigning in 1988.

During his tenure on the board, the Midelfort Clinic HMO, now Valley Health Plan, was formed.

In 1997, conflicts with the HMO, large-clinic managed care and its interference with the practice of medicine prompted Bannister to retire.

## Health Matters

**DIABETES LECTURE:** Dr. Charles Bingham, a Luther Midelfort endocrinologist, will give a free presentation on "Diabetes Management: What's New in 2006" from 6 to 7 p.m.

Thursday in conference rooms 2 and 3 at Luther Hospital, 1221 Whipple St.

Take the A elevator to the cafeteria in the lower level; the conference rooms are adjacent to the cafeteria.

Bingham will give a brief overview of historical perspectives in diabetes management and then discuss new injectable and inhaled insulins, their pros and cons and the patients for whom they are best suited. He also will cover what's new in insulin pumps and glucose monitoring.

Bingham is a special guest at Luther Midelfort's monthly Diabetes Support Group, which meets the first Thursday of each month.

No registration is necessary. For information call 838-6594.



**MENTAL HEALTH:** Staff of First Things First Counseling and Consulting will present a free seminar from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the Best Western Trail Lodge Hotel and Suites, 3340 Mondovi Road.

The seminar is in conjunction with child and adolescent mental health awareness week and includes topics on depression, anxiety, addiction, shame, suicide and aggression as a learned behavior.

No registration is required.

Call 832-8432 for more information.

**SHRINERS CLINIC:** Mehara Shrine Club of Eau Claire and Chippewa Shrine Club of Chippewa Falls will hold an evaluation/nurse clinic from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday at Mehara Center, 2625 Folsom St.

The Shrine/Masons of North America provide free care to children 17 and under with orthopedic problems, burns or related conditions at 22 Shrine-run hospitals. Children from this clinic will be referred to the Shriners Hospital for Children in the Twin Cities.

More than 100 applications are received by this hospital alone each month, but they have room to help more local children.

Contact J. Kevin Johnson at 832-1674, or stop by during the clinic, for more information.



**GET SOME Z'S:** May is Better Sleep Month. Luther Midelfort neurosciences experts will offer help at two free events.

■ Sleep source: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Luther Midelfort kiosk at Oakwood Mall, near the "KidZone" play area. Attendees can take a free screening test to see if they might have a sleep disorder, see what happens during a sleep study, learn about treatment options and pick up a free sleep promotion kit.

Those who already use a BiPAP or CPAP machine to help them sleep should bring it along. Experts from Midelfort Pharmacy and Home Medical will check it for free to make sure it is working properly.

■ Borders "Health Break": 7 p.m. Thursday, May 18, Borders, 4030

Commonwealth Ave. Nurse practitioner Kerri Crank will discuss "A's to Zzzzs — What You need to Know to Get a Better Night's Sleep." She'll cover insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea syndrome, restless leg syndrome and more. Learn more about what you can do to get a better night's sleep. A respiratory therapist also will be available to answer questions.

For more information call 838-3014 or visit [www.luthermidelfort.org](http://www.luthermidelfort.org).



**LYMPHEDEMA GROUP:** The rehabilitation department at Barron Medical Center invites patients with lymphedema as well as their family members, friends and caregivers to a free educational gathering, "Lymphedema: Laugh & Learn Group" at 6 p.m. Monday, May 8, at the Barron Area Community Center.

Nicole Samuels, a physical therapist and nationally certified lymphedema therapist, will discuss "Aquatic Exercise for Lymphedema" with demonstrations in the community center's swimming pool. Participants should bring swimwear and a towel.

Lymphedema is the accumulation of fluid or swelling in a body part, which may lead to serious complications.

Future meetings will be Aug. 14 and Nov. 13. For more information about Barron Medical Center's lymphedema group meetings or services available for patients with lymphedema, contact the rehabilitative services department at (715) 537-9905.



**HEALTHY EATING:** Dan Czelatdko, a board-certified clinical nutritionist, will present a free seminar on the

healthy diet at 6:15 p.m. Tuesday at Tenold Chiropractic Health and Rehab Clinic, 3814 Oakwood Hills Parkway.

The seminar will discuss which foods to include in your diet and which to avoid. It also will cover label reading and discussion of fats, carbohydrates and protein as well as supplementation.

To reserve a seat, call 833-8777.



**HEALTH CLASSES:** Several free health classes are forming at Unity Health & Fitness, 3656 Mall Drive, including:

■ Raindrop Therapy, a technique using a sequence of essential oils designed to allow a reduction of tension and stress naturally, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday. Therapy combines foot reflexology, an essential oils massage and warm compresses. Presented by Jody Hagedorn, a certified reflexologist and Reiki master/teacher.

■ Posture Analysis, various times and dates in May, next session is 11 a.m. to noon Thursday. Participants will get a snapshot of their posture and spinal health. Sponsored by Steven Bircher of Bircher Chiropractic.

■ Designing Your Own Activity Plan, 6 to 7 p.m. Monday. Gay Jennings, a certified personal trainer, will answer common fitness programming questions.

■ Yoga ... What's It All About, 7 to 7:45 p.m. Wednesday, May 10. Donna Sauter, a certified instructor and group exercise director at Unity, will explain why yoga has become one of the most popular forms of exercise. Dress comfortably.

■ Effective Chair Exercises, 10:30 to

11:15 a.m. Thursday, May 11. Attendees will learn chair-based exercises designed to increase cardio-respiratory endurance, strength and flexibility. Led by Jessica Kurth, a fitness specialist at Unity.

■ Blood Pressure Checks, various times and dates in May, next offering is 4:30 to 6 p.m. Monday, May 15. Dr. Donald Riemer, a holistic medical doctor who holds office hours at Bircher Chiropractic, will offer the pressure checks.

Call 833-2201 for more information.



**NURSE WEEK:** Strength. Commitment. Compassion. That's the theme for National Nurses Week, May 6 through 12, which Luther Midelfort is celebrating at several events in May:

■ Nurses' Walk 2006. The two-mile walk will be at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, May 11, at Carson Park.

■ Poster presentations. Luther Midelfort nurses will present educational and promotional posters from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday, May 11, in the Education Center at Luther Hospital, 1221 Whipple St. The posters, made by departments or individuals, celebrate aspects of nursing and highlight specialized areas of care.

■ Recognition awards. Luther Midelfort will honor nurses in the areas of nursing practice, research, quality and education at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, May 11, in the Education Center at Luther Hospital, 1221 Whipple St. Winners will be given vouchers toward continued nursing education.

From staff reports