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Elizabeth Edwards has cancer. John McCain has had cancer in the past. Last weekend, Mrs. Edwards bluntly pointed out that neither of them would be able to get insurance under Mr. McCain's health care plan.

It's about time someone said that and, more generally, made the case that Mr. McCain's approach to health care is based on voodoo economics — not the supply-side voodoo that claims that cutting taxes increases revenues (though Mr. McCain says that, too), but the equally foolish claim, refuted by all available evidence, that the magic of the marketplace can produce cheap health care for everyone.

As Mrs. Edwards pointed out, the McCain health plan would do nothing to prevent insurance companies from denying coverage to those, like her and Mr. McCain, who have pre-existing medical conditions.

The McCain campaign's response was condescending and dismissive — a

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That's a recipe for having healthy veterans drop out of the system, undermining its integrated nature and draining away resources.

Mr. McCain, then, is offering a completely wrongheaded approach to health care. But the way the campaign for the Democratic nomination has unfolded raises questions about how effective his eventual opponent will be in making that point.

Indeed, while Mrs. Edwards focused her criticism on Mr. McCain, she also made it clear that she prefers Hillary Clinton's approach — "Sen. Clinton's plan is a great plan" — to Barack Obama's. The Clinton plan closely resembles the plan for universal coverage that John Edwards laid out more than a year ago. By contrast, Mr. Obama offers a watered-down plan that falls short of universality, and it would have higher costs per person covered.

Worse yet, Mr. Obama attacked his Democratic rivals' health plans using conservative talking points about choice and the evil of having the government tell you what to do. That's going to make it hard — if he is the nominee — to refute Mr. McCain when he makes similar arguments on behalf of such things as privatizing veterans' care.

Still, health care ought to be a major issue in this campaign. I wonder if we'll have time to discuss it after we deal with more important subjects, like bowling and basketball.

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