When I was first diagnosed as diabetic in 1962, it was almost impossible for a diabetic on insulin to get life insurance, except at the most abnormal, penal rates. Today, we can obtain insurance at almost normal premiums, even though insurance companies are not in the habit of throwing their money away! They can see the improvement. Today we, the diabetic community, feel more in control and know that we can have a normal life. We can fit our diabetes into our lives and not fit our lives into the diabetes.

This tremendous achievement is one result of the improved health technologies which are of benefit to all. Glucose test strips are simple and inexpensive, yet to me they are the elixir of life. Because thanks to them I can monitor my own blood sugar, and I can vary my diet and dietary requirements accordingly. This is why, to the diabetic on insulin, the availability of blood glucose monitoring equipment has been almost as important as the discovery of insulin. We know what the unavailability of such basic equipment may mean in terms of quality of life.

I was very fortunate to be able to visit Romania immediately after the 1989 revolution to see for myself the problems there. Although they had excellent, dedicated doctors and health workers, I was horrified to see the number of patients who had suffered amputations, who were blind, who suffered other complications from diabetes and who clearly were no longer able to perform a useful job or enjoy a full and happy life-style.

How can this be today? Those who are governing us should be asking this question themselves. I refer not only to people from central and eastern Europe, but also to those from sophisticated "Western" economies. I understand that in one of the latter countries (perhaps the most sophisticated and the wealthiest) there is a problem in obtaining free distribution of glucose strips because the health insurance companies say they are too expensive. Too expensive to whom is the right question to ask. Improved and affordable health procedures can work wonders everywhere, and there is still a lot to do if we want this simple fact to be acknowledged.

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