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Bigger than Obamacare: Nursing and the history of American healthcare

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This presentation is designed to help the hearer understand the historical antecedents to as well as the current American healthcare systems and nursing within these systems. A plural of “system” is deliberately chosen since the U.S. does not have a single system but rather has multiple systems. None of the systems currently in operation have been without controversy or without their particular challenges. For example, a desire either to “get rid of” or to keep what has popularly been called “Obamacare,” the Affordable Care Act passed during the Presidency of Barack Obama, was a major campaign topic during the 2016 American Presidential Elections. The winner, Donald Trump, promised his constituency that he would “get rid of” Obamacare. The reaction to this has been alarmed protest from some and a sense of vindication from others. But there is no healthcare within the US which has come into existence without challenges, if not controversy, and nurses within those systems have had to learn to provide competent and compassionate care, sometimes supported by the system and sometimes in spite of the system. Reflecting on the historical development of these various healthcare delivery systems and how nursing has functioned within them can offer us insight into options for responding to future system changes and the challenges which will come with those changes.

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