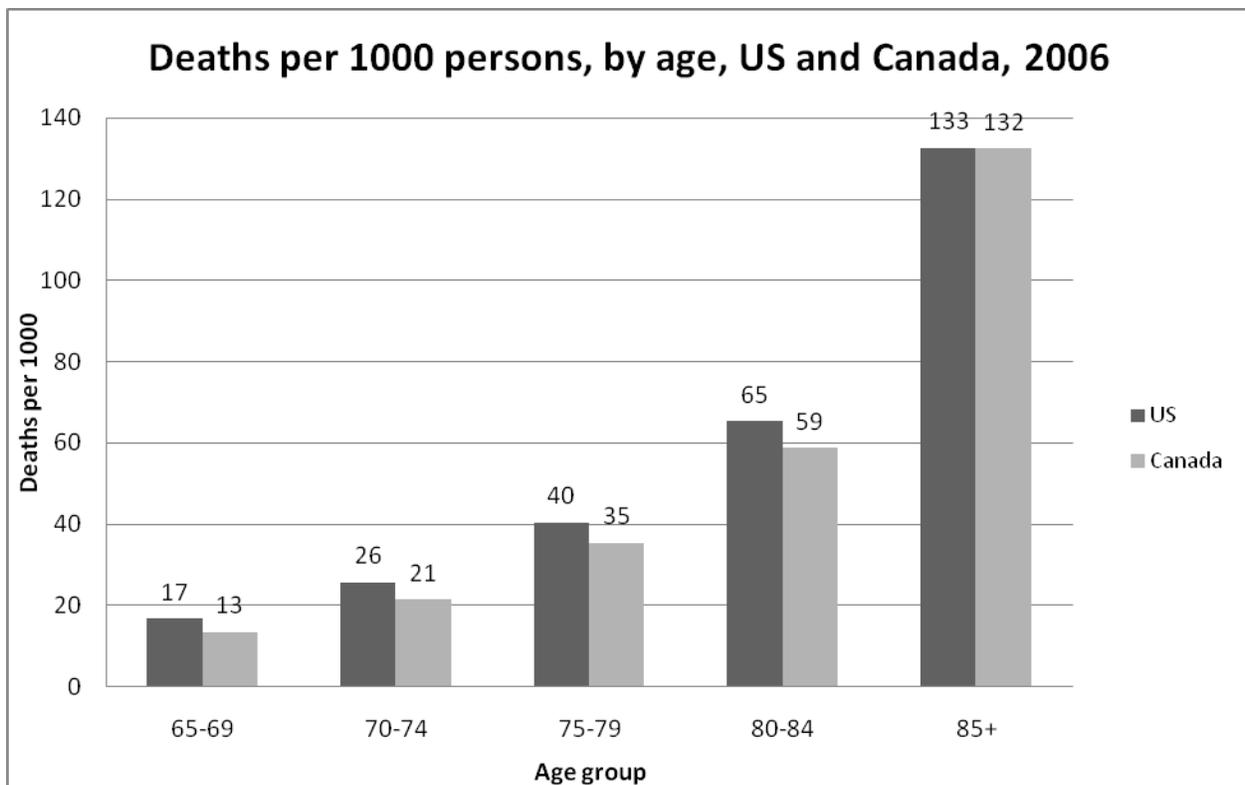


Grandma Lives Longer in Canada

In the blizzard of misinformation being circulated by the opponents of health reform, one of the claims is that “socialized medicine” controls costs by letting the elderly die before their time. This claim has been made not just by protestors at town hall meetings, but also by Republican leaders in the Congress. Perhaps because it is such a nearby reminder that everyone can be insured at a reasonable cost, Canada has been particularly subject to these false claims, leading Stephen Colbert to refer jokingly to “Canada’s corpse-strewn landscape”.

The truth of the matter is that death rates for the elderly are lower in Canada than in the United States. In 2006, the most recent year for which death rates have been published by age, 17 people between the ages of 65 and 69 died for every 1000 people of that age in the US, compared with only 13 per 1000 in Canada (see chart). The differences between the two countries are larger at older ages. For people between the ages of 80 and 84, 65 per 1000 died in the US, compared with 59 per 1000 in Canada. In the final age group, 85 and older, death rates are about the same because, even in Canada, everyone eventually dies.



These numbers are rates – deaths of people in an age group per 1000 people in that age group – not total deaths. Rates were created so that groups of very different sizes could be fairly

compared. So it does not matter that the population of the US is much larger than the population of Canada. Bill O'Reilly fans, take note.

In fact, Canadians do better at all ages. Starting at birth, death rates at every age are lower in Canada than in the US. This is summarized in life expectancy, a number that shows how long the average citizen could expect to live if the death rates of a given year held true for a lifetime. Life expectancies estimated for 2009 by the CIA's *World Factbook* put Canada at 81.2 years, the US at 78.1 years – a 3-year advantage for the Canadians. Life expectancy is longer than ours in all the countries whose national health systems have been charged with letting old people die to save money. Even the United Kingdom, well known for the low cost of its National Health Service, has a longer life expectancy than the US, 79.0 years.

It looks like socialized medicine is actually good for your health, even, or perhaps especially, if you are elderly. For sure, misinformation campaigns that try to obscure the truth will do nothing good for anybody's health.

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