

Monsters in our midst? Media and the power of language



I just finished seeing a room full of monsters. No giant with a single eye in the middle of his forehead. No green, fire-breathing dragon with a ferocious disposition. No patient with an unfortunate tendency toward cannibalism. Simply a concerned mother with 2 children who turned out to have the usual upper respiratory infections, nothing more.

This mother and her children looked like other people you know: your children, your mother or daughter, your next door neighbor. No horns to uncover, no tentacles to expose. But recently I learned that they are walking incarnations of a ferocious phantasm, monsters out to eat us all.

Why, certainly you have heard the name of this monster?

"We must tame the Medicaid monster," decried our governor at his State of the State Address. The news media were quick to use similar language: Medicaid was "devouring" the budget and generally enjoying a veritable smorgasbord at our expense.

As is true of many states, Ohio faces financial challenges. Deemed chief among these is the growing cost of Medicaid. I do not question that state budgets are in jeopardy or that we should thoughtfully assess the value of our health care dollar. But what does this language connote to the people Medicaid is intended to help?

I see no monsters in my examination room.

All I see are 2 small children and their mother wanting a little reassurance. A bit of help. Access to health care and the services you and I—and yes, our governors—take for granted.

In trying to name our fiscal ailments, let's be careful we do not act monstrously.

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