

Letter to the Editor

Finally, the Congressional Budget Office has cleared the air. We now know that the current health reform bills will significantly increase health care costs. Another piece of insight that must be understood is: reducing a Medicare payment does not save the health care system anything. The government may pay less, but the cost of providing that service has not changed. Instead of spending more money, our Federal government must pay attention to things it can do to REDUCE costs! This can be best done by reducing the demand for health care services. So it is time to get started. Specifically, what can government do? Let me count the ways.

- Encourage cost savings through primary prevention by providing financial incentives for individuals to live healthy lifestyles. Congress must promote patient prevention rewards and abolish the concept of community rating.
- Secondary prevention (early detection) and tertiary prevention (teaching individuals how to care for their chronic diseases) must be supported.
- Re-direct significant health care research dollars to explore the best way to deliver effective and economical care. Remember managed care and HMOs? If this is what is meant by Congress as “accountable organizations,” let us have many more.
- Another spot for more research is for comparative treatment evaluation. We know that medical practice varies greatly from one area of the country to another. What treatment is best?
- Attack Defensive Medicine. Up to 20% of our nation’s health care costs are the result of a tort system out of control. Excessive testing, un-necessary treatments and non-productive pressure on physicians and the health care system are a national disgrace. Today’s roulette wheel of justice is a disaster. Community systems of injury adjudication must be created and put into place.
- Eliminate state mandates and allow national sale of health care policies, period.

Let’s face it. Just spending more money will make our health system problems worse. Taking more money away from selected segments of our population by taxation will negatively impact investment and innovation. Why not simply work to make health care less expensive. Who loses?

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Published August 10, 2009
Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era

One step at a time

Health care reform confusion makes impossible serious discussions. Even a Chicago Tribune editorial (Aug. 13) asks Obama to "Take reform one step at a time." If President Obama uses his pulpit Wednesday to push the same reforms by simply speaking louder and more forcibly, America will lose a great opportunity.

The 1,000-plus pages House Bill is only one of four bills on the table. Even the combination of bills does not provide serious cost reductions and all seem to promise higher taxes on someone. This should be enough to kill any reform presently proposed.

Clearly, tort reform could reduce costs. Allowing nationwide sales of health care insurance, eliminating state mandates and allowing tax deductibility for premiums (just like businesses) would reduce a significant portion of the uninsured load. Research to identify the most efficient systems of care delivery is needed. Finally, our lifestyles must be reformed. Great savings are possible.

Mr. President, slow down and let the people win.

-Stu Wesbury, Willow Street

Published September 6, 2009
Lancaster (PA), Sunday News