



TEXAS ACADEMY *of* FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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TAFP STATEMENT: TAFP PRESIDENT ISSUES STATEMENT ON NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM

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Statement Attributable to:

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Over the course of the last several weeks the public “debate” on national health care reform has taken the significantly more strident and nasty tone of a mudslinging political campaign than a civil discourse on policy options for improving our health care system. The stakes and tempers are running high as competing interests dump millions into slick, misleading advertising designed to spin their version of reform or just kill the effort outright.

Understandably, some of our members have expressed concern, fear or outright opposition to health care reform. While I suspect a lot of this is fear from what they are reading or seeing in news reports and on the Internet, some is related to closely held personal and political beliefs, which deserve our respect and attention. The concerns are legitimate, but the alarms are somewhat misplaced.

While TAFP has not taken an official position supporting or opposing any of the current bills pending before Congress, we do support health care reform to reestablish primary care as the core of America’s health care delivery system. The various measures being debated in Congress are far from perfect, but do provide an unprecedented opportunity to remedy the dysfunctional aspects of our fractured and demonstrably inefficient health care system.

In legislative matters, the perfect is the enemy of the good and even the perfect will have imperfections. The one thing both sides of the aisle in Washington agree on is to restore and promote primary care.

The proposals making their way through the Senate and the House of Representatives contain numerous provisions that are designed to support family medicine: increasing and improving Medicare and Medicaid payment for primary care services, eliminating the Medicare SGR, reforming the private insurance market and reducing administrative hassles, expanding scholarships and loan repayment programs for primary care physicians, and providing health insurance to more people.

Not surprisingly, reform efforts have been the subject of intense partisan bickering and a good deal of misinformation. The one thing I am certain of is that the legislation being debated today, which has been the focus of most of the media and partisan attention, will most assuredly not be the final product Congress votes on. Any literal reading of the current legislative vehicles will have physicians chasing rabbits or each other, and seeing ghosts while the legislation undergoes constant reconstructive surgery.

Timing—as the old political saw goes—is everything, and the question remains: Is now the time for health care reform, or is Congress high-centered one more time over fundamental ideological differences and forced to kick this very large can down the proverbial road?

As a profession steeped in scientific methods, let's test the null hypothesis: If we do nothing, will things get better on their own? I am afraid there will be no political will from either party to try significant reform again until a crisis requires it. We will be stuck with the same problems we face today. Primary care services will continue to be undervalued. The Medicare SGR will stay as is and we will be forced to fight significant cuts in payment every year. Health insurance premiums will continue to increase, forcing more employers to drop coverage and creating more uninsured patients. There will be increased financial scrutiny of physicians as additional draconian cost containment strategies will be implemented to try to slow the growth rate of health care costs.

We have a pretty good idea of what's broken and needs to be fixed so that doctors can provide the right care at the right place and time. While none of the various proposals are perfect, major changes will occur as the bills make their way through the legislative process.

Please know the TAFP is engaged in this substantive policy debate to make our health care system work better. AAFP's early participation in this debate keeps them at the negotiating table where any legislation will inevitably be resolved.

I urge you not to let foolish politics scare you and to stay informed on policy developments through evidence-based channels. TAFP leadership and staff will continue to develop resources on these topics and pass along this information to you. If you have thoughts or concerns, please e-mail president@tafp.org.

The Texas Academy of Family Physicians is the premier membership organization dedicated to uniting the family doctors of Texas through advocacy, education and member services, and empowering them to provide a medical home for patients of all ages. It has 33 local chapters and is a chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Visit www.tafp.org for more information.