

An Open Letter to the US Congress:

Dear Member of Congress:

We represent a broad constituency of academic, clinical and health administrative professionals who have dedicated our professional lives to the people who receive care in the American healthcare system. We have taken care of patients, managed large and small healthcare organizations, taught young students medicine and public health and conducted research on the quality of healthcare and ways to improve the healthcare system for all Americans. As healthcare experts and concerned citizens, we come together in this letter to reaffirm that the current healthcare system is in crisis and is not sustainable in the future. The bills under consideration contain provisions that will seriously address problems in healthcare and must be reconciled. We reaffirm the importance of meaningful policy change in this legislative session and call upon you to act.

The lack of insurance for 46 million citizens and the rising costs of care for everyone must be addressed. We believe there are a minimum of policy changes that must be included in any Health Reform legislation and urge you to adopt the following provisions:

- Provide coverage to 35-40 million additional US citizens
- Increase competition in the private insurance market and eliminate discrimination based on pre-existing conditions in the purchase of health insurance
- Cover essential preventive care and improve access to primary care
- Ensure affordability of health insurance for low- and moderate-income families through sufficient subsidies of families and small businesses.
- Slow the rise in costs of healthcare and health insurance premiums for everyone
- Adopt a shared responsibility for achieving savings and financing the added coverage through contributions from employers, insurance companies, hospitals, doctors, drug companies and patients
- Support and disseminate the results of Comparative Effectiveness research to help practitioners and patients chose the best healthcare
- Expand the Federal, State and private sector commitment to improving the quality of healthcare for all citizens

While this list may not meet all of the policy changes that any one of us supports, it does offer a core set of provisions that each of us can support.

We are extremely concerned that a small but vocal minority of people in the current debate have misstated and distorted numerous facts in an effort to scare our citizens. This is unconscionable and you must not be distracted from the critical task at hand.

For the record, here are facts that you must consider as you move forward. The current bills

- *Do not allow government to ration healthcare.* To the contrary, they promote the use of Comparative Effectiveness Research to give doctors and patients more information about the latest research so that patients can get the best care available. How can anyone be opposed to giving physicians the best information available to treat patients?
- *Will not promote or allow euthanasia.* To the contrary, they only allow senior citizens to have an optional consultation with a physician about what end of life procedures they want or do not want.
- *Will not allow government to deny benefits to Down-Syndrome children or any other disabled person.* By expanding Medicaid the proposals will provide coverage for many disabled persons not now eligible for insurance.
- *Will not break the budget.* The President and Congress have vowed to make it budget neutral.
- *May slow the rate of increase in some provider payments but will not diminish benefits or access to physicians.* Providers will receive additional payments from the newly insured persons that will offset proposed savings to help finance coverage.
- *Will not take away existing health insurance coverage.* The bills will give anyone without insurance the option to purchase health insurance regardless of their health status and economic ability.
- *Will not cover illegal aliens.* The legislation being considered does not cover or include immigrants not lawfully present in the US.

In summary, we strongly believe that the legislation being considered by the Congress significantly improves upon the status quo of our healthcare system. Congress has a moral and ethical obligation to conclude their deliberations this fall and send to the President a Health reform bill that will be signed. We often hear that America has the best healthcare system in the world. While that is debatable, we do know that no other nation spends the amount of money for healthcare and has such poor outcomes as we do. This is simply unsustainable. It is time to improve healthcare for all our citizens.

Respectfully,

THE UNDERSIGNED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

(Due to the publication deadlines for the Press Conference on September 17th we have added signer names through 9/13/09. We continue to collect signatures at a rapid pace and will release an additional letter in several weeks. All signers names are listed on the website.)

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