

Illinois State Medical Society



An Open Letter to Illinois Patients from the Doctors of the Illinois State Medical Society November 2009

This fall, our nation faces a significant opportunity to cover the uninsured and expand patient access to care. We support continuing efforts by the American Medical Association and the White House to achieve meaningful reform and preserve the patient-physician relationship.

However, we cannot support the direction of current proposals before Congress.

The proposed reforms are not meaningful unless they help you, the patient, gain *real* access to medical care in your local community when you and your loved ones need it. Insurance companies must not be allowed to deny care based on your pre-existing condition, or manipulate your insurance premium to make insurance unaffordable. You should not lose your insurance coverage because you lose or change jobs, or because you get sick. You should not be forced to accept a health system that wastes money or reduces quality and access to care.

Our physician members are very concerned health reform is moving in the wrong direction ... that Congress is constructing it on the faulty foundations of Medicare and Medicaid. Heaping more strain on these public programs without first repairing their flaws will undermine your access to care.

Did you know the Illinois Medicaid program has been woefully underfunded for more than a decade? Yet congressional health reform proposals rely heavily on Medicaid expansion to cover the neediest patients in our state.

Did you know that just last week, the U.S. Senate refused to repair Medicare's fatally flawed payment system? We thank Senators Durbin and Burr for supporting repair of Medicare. But its defeat at the hands of other Senators imperils access to care for 1.6 million Illinois Medicare patients.

The health reform debate has reached a critical juncture. We at ISMS offer the following guidance to you, our patients, on what we consider the essential components for *real*, lasting, cost effective health reform.

The Illinois State Medical Society calls on Congress to deliver:

- Access to affordable health insurance coverage for all, tailored to individual needs and with individual responsibility for obtaining insurance and finding a medical home.
- Health insurance market reforms to help patients obtain and keep affordable health insurance and to remedy widely documented abusive insurer practices such as pre-existing condition exclusions and denials of medically necessary care.
- Changes in antitrust law to promote information sharing and care coordination between doctors and to level the playing field in negotiations with health plans.
- Permanent correction of the fatally flawed Medicare physician sustainable growth rate formula which has restricted patient access to care.

- Strong and effective medical litigation reforms to reduce the costs of wasteful defensive medicine.
- Subsidies for low-income individuals and families to purchase private health insurance, as a means of covering the uninsured and as a market-based alternative to Medicaid expansion.
- Health education, prevention and wellness initiatives to improve patients' overall health and reduce long-term costs.
- Initiatives and incentives to assure there will be enough physicians trained in the future to care for patients.

Not all reforms are good for patient care. The Illinois State Medical Society stands opposed to:

- Government-mandated treatment guidelines that interfere with doctors' clinical decision-making and the doctor-patient partnership.
- A government-subsidized "public option" that would unfairly compete in the health insurance market.
- A single payor health system. ISMS believes health system reform should improve and expand upon the current public-private system and focus on incremental, evolutionary change.
- Further expansion of Medicaid as a means of covering the uninsured. Given Illinois' track record of a woefully underfunded Medicaid program, we much prefer subsidies for the private purchase of health insurance by low-income patients.

Sincerely,

The Physician Members of the Illinois State Medical Society