



Oklahoma State Medical Association News Release

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Oklahoma Physicians and Health System Reform

Oklahoma State Medical Association (OSMA) physicians have been relentless advocates for healthcare system reform that puts patients' healthcare needs and their interests first. While we appreciate the fact that the health system reform bill potentially provides health insurance coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans, we are disappointed that Congress and the President failed to fix some of the most important problems that are major flaws.

"Congress and the President missed the opportunity to truly reform health care last weekend," said OSMA President Kent, King, MD, "Put simply, while some provisions in the bills were steps in the right direction, the measures passed by the Congress are mostly bad medicine for Oklahoma patients."

Our goal for reform has always been simple and direct: keep what is good and fix only what is wrong with our health care system. "Congressional action this weekend did little to fix the glaring problems in our system and unfortunately could saddle our patients with more bureaucracy, higher taxes, increased costs, and more red tape," Dr. King said.

Here is how the Congressional bills fall short:

1. These bills do nothing to address the high costs of medical care related to defensive medicine. Oklahoma joined a handful of other states in enacting comprehensive liability reforms on the state level in 2009. In stark contrast, this Congressional effort does nothing meaningful to address tort reform that could the lower high cost of health care.
2. These measures could impose unproven and arbitrary treatment standards aimed at reducing the cost of care without improving the quality of care.
3. The measures will dramatically increase the federal government bureaucracy (for example, over 16,000 IRS employees will be needed for enforcement purposes).
4. They will limit access to care because the flawed Medicare payment formula Congress created in 1997 to pay physicians. The physicians who see Medicare patients will no longer be able to afford to see them. Without a Congressional fix, this so-called sustainable growth rate formula (SGR) will impose a 21.5 percent physician payment cut and will be directly responsible for limiting access to care for the poor, disabled, senior citizens and our military families;
5. Patients who now have private insurance through their employer are likely to be forced to accept a lower quality government controlled insurance.
6. Finally, this legislation significantly restricts the patient and the doctor from privately contracting with an insurance carrier by providing the wrong kind of financial incentives for employers.

While there are some good elements of the legislation such as eliminating pre-existing conditions, lifting the lifetime cap on coverage and allowing dependent children to stay on their parents' policies until they reach the age of 26, the health reform legislation passed last weekend will do more harm than good.

The physicians in Oklahoma will continue to work closely with our state and federal representatives to improve our health care system's quality and our patients' access to affordable care.

The Oklahoma State Medical Association represents over 5,000 physicians and medical students across Oklahoma and is dedicated to improving the health of all Oklahomans.

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