



**Cavarocchi-Ruscio-Dennis Associates**

# **Health Policy Report**

**June 1, 2009**

## **SPECIAL REPORT!**

- **HEALTH CARE REFORM IS COMING TO CONGRESS THIS MONTH AND NEXT**
- **EVERY SGIM MEMBER MUST BE AN ADVOCATE NOW**
- **PRIMARY CARE, TITLE VII, CER, REIMBURSEMENT RATES, ARE ALL ON THE TABLE FOR DECISIONS**

### **Overview**

#### **Congress, Administration Get Ready**

Congress and the White House have continued through the month of May to develop and refine proposals to overhaul the health care delivery and financing system in the United States. In this Special Report, we will focus entirely on the initiative that the President has said must happen this year or will not happen during his administration.

The enormity of the task before Congress cannot be overstated. Health represents fully one in every six dollars of the entire US domestic economy. There are literally trillions of dollars at stake in this debate. But, far more importantly, the status and quality of the health care that is provided to and received by American people is hanging in the balance.

For SGIM members, reimbursement rates are on the table. And, those rates will impact the quality of care that is provided to patients. Research and training issues are going to be impacted; there will likely be significant provisions related to prevention and wellness. The bottom line is that it will all be on the table.

It is now expected that a bill could be on the floor of the House as early as late June or mid-July. The Senate appears to be headed toward consideration in July. The administration continues to pressure the Congress to have this legislation finalized and sent to the President for signature in 2009. While Congress has a long history of missing deadlines on major legislation, it is worth noting that the both the economic stimulus bill and the FY09 Omnibus Appropriations bill were passed by the dates promised.

### **Education Subcommittee Issues**

For the past several months SGIM has been urging Congress to reauthorize Title VII health professions training programs, and to include that legislation in any health care reform proposals Congress considers. Through the tireless efforts of former subcommittee chair, Preston Reynolds, MD, PhD, FACP, it appears that the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) committee proposal will include reauthorization and expansion of Title VII.

According to an internal outline obtained by SGIM, the legislation would expand federal health care workforce development programs and create a Workforce Commission to strengthen the health workforce, the document said. The commission would recommend ways to ensure a sufficient supply of primary care physicians, nurses, and other practitioners, and the bill would create new grant programs to specially train health professionals in geriatric care to address special needs of a booming aging population, the document said.

Although the detailed proposal has not been released, the subcommittee is hopeful that in addition to extending the existing Training in Primary Care Medicine and Dentistry program, the proposal also will eliminate the ratable reduction that often hampered funding opportunities. The subcommittee also sought the establishment of new Primary Care Training Institutes, aimed at fostering greater collaboration among disciplines. If adopted, the proposal will build patient safety and best practices into curriculum for health practitioners to learn how to deliver new models of high quality care.

The proposal will also expand scholarship and loan repayment programs to minorities to enter into health professions so they may return to serve the communities they come from. Additionally, the proposal is said to provide technical assistance to implement quality improvement activities that can be

adopted in different settings serving different populations. Finally, to improve patient engagement in shared treatment decision making, the proposal will require that tools and training are culturally component and health literate to engage patients.

Details of the proposal will be reported in the next HPC update.

### **Research Subcommittee Issues**

While research is not going to be a major focus of the overall health care reform debate, one area that may receive a disproportionate share of attention is Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER). Without having seen the draft legislation yet (because it is not completed), we expect that there is going to be a fundamental difference between the House and Senate bills.

The House bill is likely to follow pretty closely to the provisions of Section 904 of the CHAMP Act, legislation that passed the House during the last Congress, but was never considered in the same form in the Senate. The House legislation placed the CER program under the jurisdiction the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), which currently operates a \$50 million CER program funded under the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA).

The Senate legislation is expected to follow a proposal first introduced last year by Finance Committee Chair Max Baucus of Montana. This legislation creates a new free-standing institute that would operate a CER program outside of the regular structure of the federal government.

### **Clinical Practice Subcommittee Issues**

- **P4P and SGR:** The Senate Finance Committee options paper on delivery system reform did not include a permanent fix for the SGR. Instead, it proposed a two year fix that would avert the 20 percent cut scheduled for January 1, 2010.
- **The RUC:** Dr. Barbara Levy from ACOG has been selected as the next RUC chair.
- **Health Disparities:** The Senate Finance Committee options paper on coverage included a proposal to collect uniform data on race, ethnicity, gender and disability that could help researchers work to end disparities in these groups.
- **Health Information Technology:** HHS will offer guidance and specifications by early summer on what constitutes “meaningful use” of information technology for healthcare providers so they can qualify for

incentives through Medicare and Medicaid included in the economic stimulus package.

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To volunteer to serve on the HPC and its subcommittees, please contact anyone listed above.