

## HEALTH POLICY CORNER: PART I

## What the Affordable Care Act Means for SGIM

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**B**y the time you read this, the Supreme Court decision to uphold the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will have been washed, spun, and dried by parties and pundits. The debate will rage on about the nuanced implications of the Court's curious interpretation of the individual mandate as a tax, the sobering limits it placed on Congressional authority within the commerce clause of the Constitution, and the impact on the health of the poor in mostly "red" states if they opt out of the ACA's Medicaid expansion, for which they would be responsible for only 10% of the additional cost by 2020.

The decision is an enormous win for SGIM as it preserves the core elements of the ACA in that it:

- Dramatically expands insurance coverage and transforms the insurance industry;
- Invests in the generalist workforce with payment incentives, enhanced funding for primary care training, and opportunities to align reimbursement for practice redesign with SGIM's patient-centered values; and
- Strategically funds health services, comparative effectiveness, and delivery system innovation.

The ACA survives to face its next contest in November. The grand political gamble is certain to remain a flash point regardless of the outcome of the election. The law remains unpopular with many Americans, with those at the political extremes arguing it went too far or not far enough.

I will leave longer-term predictions to the historians. My aim here

is to highlight the important role of SGIM and its members in the ongoing struggle to improve health through the expanded access, quality, and value of health care envisioned in the ACA.

I had the unparalleled privilege to serve on the Ways and Means Committee as a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellow the year we passed the ACA. I followed in the footsteps of other SGIM members on that powerful House Committee—Gene Rich and Tom Tsang. I worked alongside SGIMers Andy Bindman and Steve Cha on the Energy and Commerce Committee. Congressional members and staff appreciate SGIM as a small but highly respected voice, an honest broker for the views of general internists, and a source of real world expertise in generalist practice, education, and research essential to the success of health reform.

SGIM's Health Policy Committee (HPC) advocates for policies that improve patient care, strengthen education and training, and promote researchers and their research in general internal medicine. The HPC provides education and opportunities for SGIM members to learn about and to engage in advocacy on the SGIM website, at national and during regional meetings, during annual Hill Day visits to Congress, and in publications, including its how-to guide "Health Care Advocacy: A Guide for Busy Clinicians."

In subsequent *Forum* articles, subcommittee chairs will expound on these key successes and advocacy agendas for SGIM:

- *Clinical Practice:* 1) improving access to care by preserving increased funding for Community

Health Centers and expanded insurance coverage in the ACA, and 2) enhancing primary care physician payment by advocacy and ongoing expert consultation with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) by SGIM members

- *Education:* 1) increasing primary care training programs by ensuring funding for Title VII provisions that were reauthorized with significant input from SGIM, and 2) advocating for reform of graduate medical education funding that is aligned with society's needs for a robust generalist workforce, helped by a forthcoming SGIM position paper
- *Research:* 1) promoting NIH agendas in comparative effectiveness and community-based research by preserving funding for the Clinical and Translational Science Award program and ensuring that it supports the full spectrum of translational science, and 2) strengthening the evidence base for clinical decision-making and innovation in health care delivery by preserving funding for the CMS Innovation Center, the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the VA research programs

SGIM and the HPC will build on its successful advocacy, coalition building, and valued reputation with policymakers, guided by our patient-centered values. Members intrigued to learn should explore the HPC website at <http://www.sgim.org/index.cfm?pagelD=245> or contact any of its leaders.