



Office Visit: Much work to be done

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For the better part of 2010, we've been inundated with talk of health care reform. Yes, I'm guilty as well, but with all the talk of what has happened, it's critical that the collective we, especially those in Washington, begin looking at what health care reform did not address and/or new problems it has created. These are just a few items we will no doubt begin to hear about louder and louder as we approach 2011.

I've been very vocal about how the restriction of physician-owned hospitals is not only against the fair trade principle America was founded on, but more importantly, how it limits consumers' access to quality health care. The title of the health care reform bill passed earlier this year is the "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act." The inclusion of restricting quality health care and a patient's right to choose a health care provider contradicts the title of the legislation itself.

As the baby boomer generation begin delving into the Medicare pot, it presents the obvious question of how can we expect to afford Medicare payments. And more importantly, if there isn't a permanent resolution to the sustainable growth rate for Medicare, more and more physicians, health systems and hospitals will begin choosing not to participate in Medicare plans, thus limiting the choice of quality health care options for those enrolled in Medicare programs. For those who do continue to see Medicare patients, the buck will be passed to non-Medicare patients, driving up the cost of health care and insurance.

The same can be said for Medicaid. The new health care legislation could increase the number of Medicaid enrollees by as much as 20 million. Programs like Medicaid are already strapped for cash and rarely pay their fair share of the costs to provide medical care. So like Medicare, patients who are insured through a commercial health insurance subsidize the federal programs by paying more than their fair share. And for those who truly require Medicaid, the increase in enrollees will adversely affect the quality of health care available to those who depend on it the most.

We are the richest and most socially responsible country in the world, but I know we can do better. It's critical over the next year and a half that Congress look at health care reform without the partisan bitterness that plagued the initial passing of the legislation, fix the mistakes the legislation caused and focus on the problems it failed to address.

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