

Health Care Costs Must Come Down

Ron Howrigan

To the Editor—There has been heated debate and discussion surrounding health care reform, the health insurance marketplaces, and what all of this will mean for the American people. There are wide-ranging opinions, including the belief that health care reform will solve all of our problems, or that the end is near and the whole system is going to implode. As a physician consultant with a master's degree in economics, I believe we are paying too much attention to the small details and not enough attention to the bigger picture.

What seems most obvious is that our health care delivery system is going to change. This country is spending too much money on health care, and it is impacting our economy and our state and federal budgets. In 1960, health care accounted for 5% of the gross domestic product (GDP), while defense spending accounted for 10% of the GDP. Now, health care is approaching 20% of the GDP, while defense spending is down to 5%. This trend cannot continue. If you do not believe me, consider the housing market over the last 20 years.

So, we know that health care costs must come down and that we cannot continue on the inflationary trend that we have experienced over the past 50 years. Knowing this, my main questions are: What will this mean for our health care delivery system and for those who provide and receive care?

Also, will the Affordable Care Act help or hurt this process?

Unfortunately, when it comes to costs, I do not believe the Affordable Care Act will help to control costs. I just do not see how it is possible to add that many people to the roles of the insured, many of them subsidized by the federal government, and actually *reduce* costs. The argument is that by insuring these people, they will utilize less costly care, but I am not buying it.

If the Affordable Care Act does not control costs, what will happen? That remains to be seen. My biggest concern is that we will try to control costs by drastically reducing reimbursement to physicians. I dread the thought of a system in which everyone is insured but there are not enough doctors left to provide care. NCMJ

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