

## Health Reform – Hendrickson

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is. This should come as no surprise to anyone who follows politics in the US, but is no less a tragedy for the nation at large and for the millions of consumers who will continue to be channeled through a failing system at tremendous financial and personal costs.

In the current debate on health care reform, the health insurance, hospital, pharmaceutical and medical industries have spent sometimes upwards of \$10 million a day to influence the outcome of health reform legislation. The economic self-interest inherent in their efforts is not lost on many in the policy process and the self-preservation nature of their efforts has created a unique opening for the chiropractic profession. Into this opening, the ICA has sought to deliver a steady stream of compelling information highlighting the importance of chiropractic as a vital part of the solution, offering as it does a proven, safe, clinically and cost effective care pathway for patients of all ages; and not a contributor to the problems of spiraling costs, massive costly and injurious errors and growing consumer dissatisfaction.

The massive national health care reform undertaking presently coming to its conclusion has stimulated an historic common effort by the organizations of the chiropractic profession. Through this effort, the chiropractic profession has developed an agreed set of goals, prepared detailed and sophisticated educational materials for policy makers and has carefully coordinated its lobbying efforts

on a scale and at a level that has never before been achieved. We urge all organizations and individual DCs to be familiar with and to utilize the materials prepared by the Summit, including the landmark white paper, The Path to Change in the US Health Care System: The Chiropractic Perspective and its equally impressive Cost Effectiveness Supplement companion paper. Copies of both of these important documents are available on ICA's website at [www.chiropractic.org](http://www.chiropractic.org).

### ICA is proud to be a dedicated participant in the activities of The Chiropractic Summit and urges all organizations in the profession to do likewise.

Because the current legislation failed to enact anything resembling a major paradigm shift, the present failing system has simply been infused with more patients and more money. To expect anything different to come from this current wave of policy changes is simply foolish. What is clear, especially in light of the failure to address the underlying causes of upwardly spiraling costs and the steady erosion of safety and quality in the US health care system, is that this current legislation is just round one in a marathon era of reform, and the reform of the reform, that will go on until true change is enacted.

Unless a genuine paradigm change is embraced, the system is headed for complete financial and operational collapse, this round of reform efforts notwithstanding. This is bad news for the nation but will represent a silver lining in which the value of chiropractic will become paramount and will represent the ultimate opportunity for the chiropractic profession. In this ongoing public policy struggle, chiropractic's goals and the rights of chiropractic patients are, however, far from secure and thus, the chiropractic profession must resolve to be engaged at the maximum possible level, perhaps for decades.

What will the likely outcome of the legislative debate mean for chiropractic? That will only become clear when a final bill is passed, and the implementation of its provisions are in full swing. Here is what makes this legislation different from any bill the chiropractic profession has ever lobbied on: By design and with the support of both parties, the exact coverage that plans created, recognized or authorized under any health care reform act must include will be left up to a national board of up to 26 appointed individuals, rather than itemized in the law.

Nine members "who are not federal employees" are to be appointed by the President, "9 members who are not Federal employees or officers and who are appointed by the Comptroller General of the United States" and "Such even number of members (not to exceed 8) who are Federal employees and officers, as the President may appoint." These benefits decision makers are to serve for three year terms.

Their mission of this Committee is to "...recommend to the Secretary of Health and Human Services...benefit standards (as defined in paragraph (4)), and periodic updates to such standards" thus establishing "the essential benefits package described in section 122, including categories of covered treatments, items and services within benefit classes, and cost-sharing." The package of benefits will then be submitted to Congress for a yes or no vote, without amendments, much like the findings of a federal commission on military base closings some years ago.

Who knows what such an isolated and independent body, predictably dominated by the medical and hospital establishment and anchored in the status quo is likely to determine as far as chiropractic benefits are concerned? ICA has very little confidence in the objectivity and fair-mindedness of such a panel, given the chiropractic profession's experience in dealing with federal agencies over the decades.

The interests of the chiropractic practitioner and the concerns and needs of chiropractic patients may stand to be significantly impacted; or, the superficial, "more of the same" character of the final legislation, simply expanding coverage by a failed system as it might, may make for a brighter opening for chiropractic. However the final legislation turns out, the ICA Legislative Team has recognized the this unprecedented period of focus on health care policy as a valuable opportunity to educate policy makers in the

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