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Dear Colleagues,

The US is headed toward historic health system reform. You've heard sound bites on the matter from various sources that may have encouraged, confused or enraged you. What will it mean to you and your practice? We don't yet know.

Has MCMS chosen sides on the health system reform debate? No. Our members' individual opinions on the problem are varied and often passionate. MCMS leadership has been watching as the process evolves at the national level, and will keep you informed of the issues in play.

Hundreds of bills and resolutions dealing with health system reform have been introduced since the 111th Congress convened on January 6, 2009. Five congressional committees, three in the House and two in the Senate, are currently drafting legislation that will eventually produce bills to be taken the floors of each chamber of Congress, debated and voted on, combined and sent to the President for his signature.

Recent media coverage has focused on President Obama's push to see reform legislation passed in each chamber of Congress before July 31, when legislators recess until September 8 for what is officially called "Summer District Work Period." The next milestone often mentioned is "in the fall," which means their "Target Adjournment" on October 30.

One bill, HR 676, "Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act", was introduced and sent to committee 1/26/09, but there has been no further congressional action. Ideas from this and other proposals could make their way into the final bill as it develops.

HR 3200, "America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009" was introduced 7/14/09 and is being debated as of this writing. The AMA announced support of this bill on 7/16/09 because it contains many elements that reflect that organization's priorities for health system reform. MSSNY, AAFP, AAP, ACP, ACOG and ACS have also expressed support.

The groups supporting HR 3200 acknowledge that its 1078 pages are not a perfect solution. According to the AMA, this bill

- could provide coverage for 97% of legal, non-elderly US residents
- eliminates coverage denials for preexisting conditions
- replaces the SGR with a favorable physician payment calculator to avoid the expected 21% cut in 1/2010
- Increases primary care reimbursement.

However, HR 3200

- does NOT include any medical liability reform
- expands the scope of nurse practitioners to lead a medical home
- cuts payments for imaging by \$4.3 billion
- restricts physician-owned hospitals.

Despite these major drawbacks, the groups supporting this legislation emphasize the fact that we are in the early stages of a long and complicated process. Working constructively with Members of Congress and the Obama Administration improves their position for critical end game negotiations when leaders reconcile the differences between the final House and Senate bills, which often look very different than the initial drafts. Their strategy is to stay at the table with a "yes, if" attitude rather than a "no, but" approach.

The Texas Medical Association, and a coalition of the medical societies of Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, D.C., Delaware, New Jersey and South Carolina, actively oppose HR 3200 and other proposed reforms. Your specialty society is also weighing in.

Eventually, the decisions made at the national level will affect how doctors care for patients in the Monroe County area. MCMS is preparing to help your practice deal with these changes.

Please let me know what concerns you, and how MCMS can be of assistance. Comments can be sent to my attention at MCMS@mcms.org

For more information:

- www.house.gov – US House of Representatives
- www.senate.gov – US Senate
- www.ama-assn.org -- AMA
- <http://www.masalink.org/news.aspx?id=2225> – State medical societies' opposition to HR 3200

Sincerely,

Stephanie E. Siegrist, MD

President, Monroe County Medical Society