

Health care reform must keep coverage, quality of care in mind

BY SALLY JEFFCOAT

Meaningful and effective health reform has the potential to substantially improve the health and well being of



our families, neighbors and friends. We urge our entire Idaho congressional delegation to work

collaboratively toward a bipartisan solution in the weeks and months ahead.

Health care in this country needs to be more efficient and affordable for everyone. To achieve this, reform requires solutions that get everyone to participate. In the United States, we have built a series of modern networks that are essential to our quality of life and our economy — our water systems, power grid, interstate highways and the Internet. With health coverage, we have the equivalent of scattered wells, individual generators, county roads and standalone computers — but no reliable health infrastructure. We will all be better off if we build a sustainable health care infrastructure and a uniquely American system that reflects the ideals of our nation.

At Saint Alphonsus, we witness firsthand the limitations of the current patchwork health system and how it prevents our nation from achieving sustainable, affordable, high-quality care for all. Our long history of health experience leads us to encourage Congress to work

toward a uniquely American approach to reform that achieves four goals:

1 Include all of us. It makes no sense to live with a system in which nearly one out of six Americans — most of whom are in working families — don't have insurance. Even those of us with insurance are vulnerable as jobs disappear and fewer employers offer coverage. We cannot settle for health care that is often "too little too late" — leading to higher costs and worse health outcomes. It is in our common interest to get everybody covered, protected and served more efficiently.

2 Coordinate care for better outcomes. In our current system, hospitals and physicians are rewarded for the number of medical procedures they perform, regardless of whether they improve the health of patients. Lawmakers are rightly pursuing pilot programs to shift financial incentives toward high-value approaches that reward quality and efficiency. We hope they will turn to successful local innovations that can be replicated across the country.

3 Eliminate redundancy and increase quality. Many of us have needlessly undergone the same test twice or completed the same information multiple times. These kinds of experiences reveal how fragmented and redundant health care can be, driving costs in the United States far beyond other industrialized nations. At

Saint Alphonsus, we are proud to be part of one of the nation's top 10 health systems — Trinity Health — ranked by Thomson Reuters for a combination of quality and efficiency of care to Medicare patients. Employing electronic health records, supporting care coordination, reducing duplication, and ensuring prescription safety have resulted in cost savings and better care for our patients.

4 Shift the focus from avoiding risk to increasing value. Insurers in our current system have incentives to avoid people who are likely to be sick because they cost more. Often, we hear stories of those who are denied care for a pre-existing condition or dropped if they get too sick. This is why lawmakers are discussing insurance rules, standard benefit packages and the transparency of an "insurance exchange" to shift the focus of competition from "risk avoidance" to value for consumers.

We urge Congress to standardize insurance claim forms and procedures so that doctors spend less time filling out paperwork and more time with their patients. And, true to our mission, we also insist that health reform ensures the rights of organizations and health providers to participate only in services consistent with their morals and faith traditions.

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