

Legislative Alert

AACAP Update on White House Physician National Call August 26, 2009

Dear AACAP members:

As a follow-up to our email on Monday, the White House held a conference call on Tuesday night for physicians to discuss the progress of healthcare reform. The conference call included 2700 physicians and three policy officials from the White House Office of Communications, Office of Public Engagement, and Office of Healthcare Reform. The call began with a review of the consumer protections in the current health care bills ([see AACAP review of the House and Senate bills](#)). One policy official, who is a primary care physician, discussed the administrative burdens of many physicians and recalled the difficulty in conducting prevention measures such as depression screening.

Prior to the call the White House received 400 questions via email. The following three questions were chosen by the White House to address during the call:

- “What specific prevention measures might be included in a federal healthcare bill?”
 - There will be no copays for preventive services; if all states provided preventive exams than at least 40K patients would not be admitted to a hospital for preventable illnesses.
- “How will the healthcare reform bill fix the sustainable growth rate that Congress annually uses to adjust physician payment rates to compensate for rising health care costs?”
 - President Obama has already factored this into the administration’s budget.
- “What is being done to increase the number of young people to go into primary care?”
 - There are increased funds for National Health Service Corps in both bills. The President also included funds for incentives to go into primary care in the Investment and Recovery Act. The President continues to encourage expansion of the scholarship programs.

The call was later open to additional questions. These questions were on issues related to Medicare Advantage Program, what type of reimbursement the bill will include i.e. a fee-for-service model versus global payment model, and the lack of liability reform measures in the legislation.

Unfortunately none of the selected questions came from AACAP members. However, of those 400 emails submitted we know that at least twenty of those questions came from AACAP members. **Thank you to all who submitted questions – it is vital that we get**

our issues in front of the Administration. The subject areas that were of most concern to our members were:

- Since mental health parity legislation was enacted, will mental health have the same priority in both the healthcare reform debate and in the actual legislation, as other health related diseases and fields? Will children be included?
- What incentives do physicians have to work in underserved areas? How will the healthcare reform legislation address workforce shortages for children with mental health needs?
- How can we build in greater support for the providers and consumers to improve quality of psychiatric care delivered to children?

With the passing of Senator Kennedy, AACAP remembers how much he accomplished for the poor, uninsured and disabled in our country. One of Senator Kennedy's greatest and final triumphs was the passage of mental health parity in 2008. Without his help, mental health parity may not have become a reality. And for that, we will always owe him a great debt. It is under his leadership that the Paul Wellstone-Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 was approved. We hope Congress will come back from their August recess and continue to fight for improved health care coverage for all Americans.

During this time, AACAP will follow the debate and update members on the progress and areas where we have the opportunity to improve the care for children with mental illnesses. It is important that Congress hear from doctors, particularly specialists such as child and adolescent psychiatrists, on the next steps for healthcare reform.