



The Healthcare Delivery System Should Be Focused on Primary Care

Issue: The health care system emphasizes specialist care rather than primary care, despite the fact that money spent on basic primary care is money well spent. According to Center for Studying Health System Change only 37 percent of doctors currently specialize in Primary Care, which is a much lower percent than other developed countries. Effective measures exist today to prevent or delay much of chronic disease burden and curtail its devastating consequences. A focus on primary care can dramatically reduce the long-term cost burden and health care demands of chronic conditions.

Position: The National Business Group on Health (the Business Group), representing over 270 large employers who provide coverage for 55 million Americans, believes that both the public and private sector should support and reward effective and efficient primary care.

The Business Group supports the following principles for reforming the health care system:

- Primary care as foundational to a high quality, efficient and effective health care delivery system
- Payment policies that recognize the value of primary care and primary care like services
- Support the concept of an “advanced medical home” as appropriate
- Growth in HIT to support and enable efficiency, quality and safety in practices of all sizes
- Educational and loan programs that encourage physicians and other health professionals to work in primary care

Why the Business Group Believes in Emphasizing Primary Care

It Will Improve Health Outcomes

- By shifting emphasis from treatment of illness and specialist care to prevention and primary care better health outcomes will be achieved. Screening for just a few key healthcare indicators can help prevent serious chronic disease and identify areas for improvement in diet and behavior.
- In the U.S., each additional primary care physician per 1000 (about a 20% increase) is associated with a decrease in mortality of about 5%, adjusting for limiting long-term illness and for various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics

It Will Significantly Reduce Cost

- When compared with other developed countries, the United States ranked lowest in its primary care functions and lowest in health outcomes, yet highest in health care spending. Studies have shown that expenditures for care for common illnesses such as community-acquired pneumonia were higher when provided by specialists than if

provided by primary care practitioners, with no difference in outcomes

- Adults (age 25 and older) with a primary care physician rather than a specialist as their personal physician had 33% lower cost of care.

It Will Improve Health Care Delivery

- The current medical delivery system provides no incentive for physicians to coordinate the tests, procedures, or patient health care generally and it puts very little emphasis on preventive services and health maintenance. An advanced medical home model will change the way in which doctors are reimbursed for medical care, from fee-for-service to a mix of fee-for-service and per month stipend for care coordination, and it will increase involvement between the patient and the physician. This will eliminate the misaligned incentives which reward individual physicians for ordering more tests and performing more procedures.
- The Commonwealth Fund reports that Denmark has organized its entire health care system around patient-centered medical homes, achieving the highest patient satisfaction ratings in the world. Primary care physicians are highly accessible and supported by an outstanding information system that assists them in coordinating care. Among Western nations, Denmark has among the lowest per capita health expenditures and highest primary care rankings.

It Will Improve Quality

- Within the United States, adults with a primary care physician were 19 percent more likely to survive their conditions when compared to those who received care from a specialist, after adjusting for demographic and health characteristics.