



Rx: Health Care FYI #4

Subject: *Community Health Centers*

From: *Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18)*

"I ask Congress to move forward on a comprehensive health care agenda with...a community health center in every poor county..." (State of the Union Address, President Bush, 2005)

The Problem:

- Many uninsured and underinsured families do not have primary care physicians.
- While low-income individuals have access to Medicaid and the elderly and disabled have access to Medicare, uninsured and underinsured families often rely on expensive care in emergency rooms, where federal law mandates care must be provided. Often, these treatments are for medical care that could have been provided at a lower cost in a non-emergency setting.
- Increasing numbers of businesses cannot afford health care for their employees and Health Savings Accounts are not an option for a family that cannot afford insurance.

Community Health Centers (CHCs):

- CHCs are non-profit, community supported health care providers who offer primary and preventive health care services to low-income, underinsured and uninsured families.
- CHCs offer a sliding fee schedule based on family income.
- Nearly 70 percent of CHC patients are members of the working poor and have family incomes at or below poverty. (\$15,206 annual income for a family of three in 2003). (*Bureau of Primary Care, 2003 Uniform Data System*)
- Over 30 percent of CHC patients are uninsured. (*Bureau of Primary Care, 2003 Uniform Data System*)

Community Health Centers save money:

- Provide comprehensive health care for about \$1.30 a day per patient served. In fact, medical care at Community Health Centers is around \$250 less than the average annual expenditure for an office-based medical provider. (*2000 Uniform Data System DHHS; Olin GL. "National Health Care Expenses in U.S. Community Population, 2000." Statistical Brief #27 DHHS. 2003*)
- Provide preventive screening and comprehensive care to save money and lives by treating diseases before they become chronic conditions or require hospital care.
- Save the Medicaid program 30 percent in annual spending due to reduced specialty care referrals and fewer hospital admissions. (*"Nation's Health At Risk II, Special Topics Issue Brief #7," National Association of Community Health Centers, August 2004*)

The Federal Government role:

- In 2006, the President requested \$2 billion for Community Health Centers.
- The Budget will complete the President's commitment to create 1,200 new or expanded Health Center sites to serve an additional 6.1 million people by 2006.
- The Budget also includes \$26 million to fund 40 new Health Center sites in high-poverty counties, beginning the commitment to open a community or rural health center in every poor county that can support one.
- More volunteer physicians are needed at Community Health Centers.
- The President is seeking to double Community Health Centers in capacity by 2006. Community Health Centers must also double their workforce by adding 12,000 clinicians and 48,000 administrative staff by 2006.
- Currently, there are too few volunteer physicians available at our nation's 3,800 Community Health Centers. However, many physicians will not volunteer their services due to the high cost of medical liability insurance.
- Volunteer physicians can include retired, semi-retired and doctors who are not practicing because of the high cost of medical liability insurance.
- Currently, the paid staff at Federally Qualified Health Centers is protected from punitive damages and gross negligence in tort claims. Extending these same protections for volunteer physicians would greatly increase the number of volunteer doctors.
- Congressman Murphy will introduce the Community Health Center Volunteer Physician Protection Act of 2005 to extend medical liability protections to volunteer physicians at these centers. To co-sponsor the Community Health Center Volunteer Physician Protection Act of 2005 contact Congressman Murphy's Health Care Legislative Assistant Michael Baxter at 225-2301 or Michael.Baxter@mail.house.gov.

An Example of Success:

- Volunteers in Medicine, a free clinic in Hilton Head, SC, increased its volunteers from 55 to over 100 physicians since the introduction of medical liability coverage to assist their recruitment efforts.