

Policy and a Pint- Tuesday 10/20 at 5pm, Kitty Kat Club in Dinkytown

Change is on the way.... Here's a chance to enjoy a pint at the suave kitty kat club, while debating proposals for health reform with knowledgeable peers. Afraid you don't know enough to participate? Don't worry, it's a complicated subject... everyone is struggling to make sense of it. We've provided some educational links below, so you can come up to speed. We welcome all viewpoints when discussing these issues.

Health Care Briefing

What's Wrong with Health Care?

1) We pay too much for too little of actual value. We spend about 2.1 trillion on health care, but by many measures (infant mortality or life expectancy), our system performs worse than other countries that spend half as much. The cost of health care is now 17% of GDP, which inhibits economic growth in other sectors. It's hard to address issues like The Great Recession, global warming, dilapidated infrastructure, or failing schools when your extra cash goes towards bad medicine.

2) Too many people are uninsured--47 million at last check. Healthy citizens have dropped their insurance since it's too expensive. But the sick must continue to pay for coverage. The pool of risk shrinks, so the sick are burdened with costs they can't afford. And some of those healthy citizens get sick and go bankrupt, passing on their costs to hospitals.

Reform

Nearly everyone (like the AMA and Insurers) agrees that reform needs to happen-- but the details remain contentious. The progress of reform is difficult to follow (especially without referencing a congressional flowchart). The reform bill has left the House, and the Senate Finance Committee, and will soon be debated by the Senate. The reform proposals recently debated in the Finance Committee primarily addresses the second problem-- lack of coverage. Here are some quotes from an article about the progress of health care reform in congress:

"In general, bills moving toward floor votes in both houses would require most Americans to purchase insurance, provide federal subsidies to help those of lower incomes afford coverage and give small businesses help in defraying the cost of coverage for their workers."

According to news sources, the final bill will probably include a public plan. The public plan may address the cost of health care-- there is speculation that a government program would force private insurers to lower costs. This may require hard bargaining with providers....doctors might take a pay cut.

Opposition to the bill

Many Americans are skeptical of the government's proposed reform of the health care system. In some cases, misinformation (whether simply naive or due to opposition propaganda) has caused a clamor at

public forums for discussing health care reform--e.g. most people are now familiar with the negative and pervasive phrase "Death Panels", which was the result of misinterpretation of a portion of the bill designed to help educate elderly patients about their care options. In other cases, politicians and citizens are concerned that the government plan will reduce the quality of their care, that the public plan will be too bureaucratic. Furthermore, the bill requires that Americans be insured, or pay a fee: this represents "Big Government" and the removal of the freedom to choose not to be insured, and many people object to both of those ideas.

Cost of Change

Democrat supporters of the bill got a boost when the Congressional Budget Office, a non-partisan government accounting agency, reported that the cost of the bill-- which would probably extend coverage to an additional 29 million Americans-- would actually save money, since it also reforms Medicare.

Suggested Reading

New England Journal of Medicine

Every week NEJM has several compelling perspective pieces on reform. This 20-minute roundtable from 10/8 online issue was a great discussion between practitioners and economists:

<http://www.nejm.org/perspective-roundtable/cost-of-health-care/>

This American Life podcast- "More is Less" (391)

This is an absolutely fascinating show. The podcast is hour long, but 15 minutes of listening is enough to get the gist. On Saturday October 17th, the second half of this two-hour show debuts on MPR (99.1 KNOW) at 1pm, and is replayed at 8pm Sunday.

http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?episode=391

NYTimes: A History of Health Care Reform

Includes some surprises. Nice graphic too:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/07/19/us/politics/20090717_HEALTH_TIMELINE.html

Twin Cities AMSA facebook page

<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=106782219556&topic=11735>