

June 2014

A newsletter from:

AfPA Health Policy Council

Physician Legislators Promoting Patient Access

www.allianceforpatientaccess.org



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ABOUT AfPA'S HEALTH POLICY COUNCIL

HPC serves as a physician led non-partisan forum to promote interstate communications between physicians serving in public office. HPC provides for a free exchange of ideas and best policies on issues impacting the practice of medicine. HPC members will join with AfPA's physician leadership to examine issues and promote policies that strengthen the physician-patient relationship while ensuring patient access to appropriate clinical care and approved therapies.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE: HAWAII'S HEALTH CARE CHALLENGES

Senator Josh Green, M.D.

When I began my four-year National Health Corps posting to Hawaii's rural Big Island, fresh from earning my medical degree at Penn State, I found myself the only physician for 30 miles. In Big Island, I witnessed health crises born of poverty and desperation that led me to the career in health policy, first as a member of the Hawaii State House and then as a state senator. Ten years later, I still balance full time ER work with my responsibilities as a state senator for Kona and Kau.

Both then and now, Hawaii suffers a severe physician shortage. We are 22% short of physicians across all disciplines, with worsening shortages the farther one travels from Honolulu. To address shortages, legislators created the Hawaii Health Corps, a loan repayment program to complement the federal program. I still wrestle with colleagues to fully fund the program's 1:1 federal match via grants, but the private sector has provided substantial financial support.

Meanwhile, Hawaii's public hospital system badly needs reform. Subsidies approach 20% of its budget due to low reimbursements from Medicaid and Medicare and high labor costs. Thus, we are pursuing legislation to allow for partial privatization of the system.

But Hawaii's healthcare system is not without its strengths. Those include nearly universal health insurance coverage, thanks to the 1974 Hawaii Prepaid Health Act, which mandates employers to cover all employees who work at least half time. We have complemented this program with the Affordable Care Act to reduce our uninsured rate from 9% to about 6%. This low uninsured rate, combined with a robust, prevention-based public health system, has resulted in Hawaii's recently being named the nation's healthiest state.

Looking toward 2015, the Senate Health Committee will likely prioritize reforming our local connector and our healthcare safety net, implementing a sustainable health information exchange, establishing an all-claims payer base, providing coverage for conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, and reconsidering environmental threats to Hawaii's citizens. Our work is cut out for us.

But for now, I'm off to a 48-hour shift in a rural ER on the Big Island. Thank you all, especially you kindred physician legislators, for serving your constituents. Come visit us in paradise!

Warmly,

Josh Green, M.D.
Hawaii State Senate



Sen. Josh Green, M.D., Hawaii





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HPC AND AFPA

The Health Policy Council (HPC) functions as a non-partisan policy forum and there are no dues or fees to join, nor are its members compensated. HPC is sponsored by the Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA), a physician led 501(c) (4) non-profit corporation. HPC programming is also supported by the Institute for Patient Access (IfPA), a related 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. HPC is not a lobbying organization and its funding is derived from grants, donations, and sponsorships provided by both for-profit and non-profit entities. Visit AfPA's website at www.allianceforpatientaccess.org for more information.

THE LOOMING DOCTOR SHORTAGE – AND HOW TO FIX IT

In a recent op-ed, “The Looming Doctor Shortage – and How To Fix It,” Tennessee State Senator Mark Green argues that federal limits on residencies for medical school graduates ignore our nation’s growing health care needs – and threatens care for patients:

When politicians of all political stripes promised access to affordable health care, nobody told us they had in mind doctor visits of a duration more appropriate to buying a car insurance policy over the phone. Yet that’s what’s happened, and it’s going to get a lot worse.

As of 2010, the U.S. Department of Health estimated that the U.S. had 15,230 fewer doctors than it needs, yet even in the face of the greatest expansion of health care in generations, Washington has kept in place a 14-year freeze on the number of medical residencies.

The doctor shortage isn’t news; we’ve been aware of it since at least 2006, and the academic community has responded, opening 11 new medical schools since 2007, with 18 more medical schools in the pipeline.

Yet the number of medical residencies, funded by Medicare, has been unchanged since the Balanced Budget Act of 1997.

What’s happening is a bottleneck: too many medical school graduates, too few residencies for them to go to. The Chronicle of Higher Education estimates that within the year, there will be more medical school graduates in Texas than there will be residencies for them to fill. Allow much more time in the waiting room if you live in the Lone Star State.

For the full article, please click [here](#).



Sen. Mark Green, M.D., Tennessee

JOIN HPC TODAY

As a physician serving in elected office you are invited to join the HPC. There are no membership dues, only a small investment of your time working with fellow physicians towards the promotion of health policies that strengthen the physician-patient relationship while ensuring patient access to appropriate clinical care and approved therapies. As a member of the HPC you will have the opportunity to network and collaborate with fellow physician-legislators in studying and crafting health policies, allowing a sharing of expertise across states.

To join or learn more about AfPA or the Health Policy Council contact Scott Migli at SMigli@allianceforpatientaccess.org or call (202) 499-4114.

