

PERSPECTIVE

Promoting Health Care Transparency and Competition



Health care crisis unites disparate groups, interests

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By Kevin Kavanagh, MD

Studies by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development say the United States has the highest cost of medical care in the industrialized world, yet has below-average life expectancy and above-average infant mortality.

The Commonwealth Fund recently ranked health care in Kentucky as 45th in the nation.

More and more Americans are uninsured, and the system appears broken. Most disturbing is that there is "increasing evidence of an inverse relationship between cost and quality," according to Berry Straube, acting chief medical officer of the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Manifestations of the U.S. health care crisis include the recent United Auto Workers strike against Ford Motor Co. over who would pay for the high cost of health care and the nurses' strike in Eastern Kentucky, in which one of the union's major demands is for more staffing.

These events and reports, along with the increasing unaffordability of health care, have galvanized many segments of society and catapulted health care reform to the top of the political agenda.

As a step toward addressing these issues in Kentucky, a coalition of groups with diverse interests have come together to convene the Conference for

Healthcare Transparency and Patient Advocacy on Nov. 16.

Transparency means a patient knows the quality and cost of care before it is received. A simple concept, but one that hasn't made its way into our health care system.

The coalition includes representatives from medicine, the legal profession, the insurance industry, labor and the Chamber of Commerce.

Marvin Feit, co-editor of the Journal of Health and Social Policy, will give an overview of the U.S. health care system. Other presentations will focus on particular facets of the problem:

- Alice Bodley, general counsel of the American Nurses Association, will stress the importance of nurses and discuss the association's lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services alleging that the Joint Commission is not assuring sufficient staffing of nurses in hospitals.
- Zenei Cortez, president of the California Nurses Association, will speak on what the California legislature has done to correct the nurse staffing problem and how the nursing shortage disappeared once staffing levels and working conditions improved.
- The keynote speaker, former U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, will discuss the importance of patient advocacy.

Summary
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**Kentucky's
Healthcare is in
crisis. State
groups are
coming together
to address the
problems of
healthcare in the
State**

**Health Watch
USA**

**Promoting Healthcare
Quality, Access &
Affordability**

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Health Watch USA

Promoting Healthcare Quality, Access & Affordability

**Transparency of
Healthcare means
knowing the quality
and cost of the service
that one receives.
This is important
whether one advoc-
ates for a single
payer system or for
consumer driven
healthcare.**

- Robert Abell will discuss the strengths and shortcomings of Kentucky laws designed to protect whistle blowers, develop quality standards for health care facilities and patient care needs. These laws are viewed by many as ineffective since they lack implementing regulations and penalties.

- Potential solutions to that problem will be presented by Dave Adkisson, president of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and Dr. Allen Grimes of Humana Corp., who will discuss consumer-driven health care and how to shop for value in your health care purchase.

- Mark Lamberth, president of the Association of Kentucky Health Underwriters, and Dr. Tom Hubbell of the Physicians for a National Health Program, will conclude the conference with a presentation of opposing views on a single-payer system and how we should fix the health care crisis.

When lawyers and doctors, unions and business join together on an issue

and agree that change in our health care system is needed, our political leaders should listen.

Dr. Kevin Kavanagh, a Somerset physician, is a member of Health Watch USA.

The Conference for Health-care Transparency and Patient Advocacy will be held on Nov. 16th at the Four Points Sheraton Lexington on Stanton Way. It is open to the public but seating is limited. For more information go the Website: www.healthconference.org

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