Optometry and health care reform
Clarke D. Newman, O.D.

A recent Commonwealth Fund report on the state of health care in the top 11 industrialized nations on Earth paints a dismal picture of the U.S. health care system. Currently, we are the most expensive system by a bunch, and we rank last in access and outcomes. Last.

With the increasing health care needs of the aging Baby Boomer population, and the cost that goes with it, the current system of health care delivery in the United States is unsustainable. Since 2006, there has been a concerted effort in this country to reform the health care system to address these concerns. This sea of change and reform across the many planes in health care is not about optometry, but as providers in that system, it concerns optometry.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), also dubbed, “Obamacare,” is central to that reform effort. It is an amalgam of efforts from many stakeholders that include large companies, the insurance industry, state and federal governments, and consumer groups. Optometry will be affected by an increased regulatory demand to join with other providers in regimes that incentivize providers to control costs and improve outcomes such as Accountable Care Organizations. Optometrists will have to move to electronic health care records and participate in quality measure reporting. Further, optometry will be increasingly relied upon to provide services that reduce morbidity of chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. That means an increased participation in medical eye care.

Optometry will have to comply with regulatory demand for continued competence demonstrations through maintenance of certifications that are certified as compliant with the American Boards of Medical Specialty, which will affect payments made to providers.

Finally, the ACA will open doors for optometry through nondiscrimination language and the children’s vision essential benefit.

Dr. Newman is a 1986 graduate of the University of Houston College of Optometry. He is in private practice in Dallas, specializing in cornea, contact lens, and refractive surgery consultation. Dr. Newman is a Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry, a Diplomate in the Academy’s Section on Cornea, Contact Lenses, and Refractive Technologies as well as the program chair. He is an adjunct professor for the University of Houston College of Optometry. Dr. Newman is a past president of the Texas Optometric Association and the former editor of Texas Optometry, the Journal of the TOA. He has served as a trustee for the Southwest Council of Optometry. Dr. Newman serves on the board of the Gas Perm Lens Institute. Dr. Newman is a Distinguished Practitioner in the National Academies of Practice. He is a member of the AOA and AOA Cornea and Contact Lens Section and serves on the Federal Relations Committee. Dr. Newman is a contributing editor to Contact Lens Spectrum. He writes and lectures frequently on a wide variety of subjects.

Please close this browser window to return to the CLCS Newsletter