

2009 Health Reform Policy Brief Health Homes

The Problem

The current health care system in the United States is organized around a complex network of insurers, government agencies and health care providers. Many Americans are unable to navigate available health care networks or insurance programs. As a result, these Americans do not know their medical history or even where to locate their medical records. This problem is largely reinforced by the lack of health information technology (IT) throughout America. While expending the most resources on health care, by 2006 only 28% of US doctors used electronic medical records as compared to the Netherlands (98%) and the UK (89%).ⁱ This inability of Americans to take control of their own health and information regarding their health care choices, and a lack of help navigating the fragmented system, has contributed to the breakdown of the current system and bad health outcomes for many Americans.

The Solution

In order to eliminate the dysfunctional fragmentation in the health care system, health reform must fundamentally shift the health system so that it is organized around the people it is intended to serve rather than forcing people to organize themselves around the system. In order to achieve this goal, Congress must expedite the change rather than wait for providers and primary care physicians to change their approach. This can be done by adopting Health Home pilots for various groups and by investing in a national health IT infrastructure. These actions will increase preventive and primary services and thus lower costs, improve care, and address the primary care shortage throughout the nation.

Healthiest State Reform Themes: *Prevention and System Re-Design*

Healthiest State Measures: *Health Home, Use of Proven Preventive Care*

Discussion

A Health Home is a trusted source of routine, prevention oriented medical, oral and mental health screening and advice that helps the patient keep health records current, complete and shared with all their health providers, and that supports their work on a personalized health and wellness plan. Depending on the patient's health condition, this plan might be as simple as daily exercise, oral health and diet objectives, or as complex as closely coordinated courses of medication, intensive therapy and close medical or mental health monitoring. The Health Home is a way to connect people to the "information, tools, and support they need to continually manage their health care and their wellness,"ⁱⁱ and the key ingredient is that the patient is in charge of his or her medical records and health needs.

The Healthiest State Campaign believes that any programs implementing the Health Home model must ensure that an individual or family has a central resource for health and wellness information, a health partner or provider advising on decisions and coordinating care, a central collection point for individual health records and an individual health and wellness plan that is actively implemented. This model is based on the theory that an individual with better access to their personal health information will be more involved in their care and have better health outcomes.

The Campaign has experienced the development and implementation of the health home model and seen it work in two distinct spheres. The first is through the Washington Health Foundation's own Community Health Access Program (CHAP). CHAP helps more than 7,000 people annually in Washington's most populous county make sense of the health care system

and create Health Homes by helping them better comprehend the health care and insurance systems, locate a central location for their medical records, and thus gain control over their health care options.ⁱⁱⁱ The second is through recommendations from Washington Governor Christine Gregoire's Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Care Costs and Access. Recommendation #3 is to provide health care cost and quality information to consumers and providers and #4 is to deliver on the promise of health information technology – allowing access to patient information from anywhere in the state. These recommendations follow the Campaign's belief that a Health Home should allow the individual to have open access to health care information so they may take charge of their own health and improve their quality of life.

Proposal

The Healthiest State Campaign believes that to successfully implement Health Homes, Congress should enact legislation to test demonstrations of integrated health systems for defined populations and patient-centered medical homes. At the same time, Congress must innovate with models that can promote this shift on a more rapid pace for larger numbers of Americans, rather than waiting for health plans or primary care physicians to slowly shift their approach. Adoption of Health Home pilots for young adults, parents and diverse populations can rapidly spread this innovation. In addition, health reform must assure that laws regarding electronic patient records not restrict themselves to modernizing provider-based and institutional record systems, but also build cross-provider and health plan functionality that supports consumer movement across the system and to different geographic locations. Any provider or institution-based electronic medical record should link to consumer health records owned by people themselves (such as the data repositories of Microsoft's HealthVault and Google Health or other consumer health information data sources).

ⁱ Davis, K., Doty, M., Shea, K., and Stremikis, K. (November 24, 2008). Health Policy. Health Information Technology and Physician Perceptions of Quality of Care and Satisfaction.

ⁱⁱ Kemper, D. and Hall, L. (January 1, 2009). The Virtual Health Home. Healthwise. Retrieved from the web on February 27, 2009: <http://hwinfo.healthwise.org/docs/DOCUMENT/8287.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://whf.org/Documents/2008-Report-Card.pdf> pg 14