

Jeff Susman, MD
Editor-in-Chief



Setting the record straight

“What they're gonna do is pull the plug on us when we get too old.”
“You won't be able to see your own doctor anymore.”
“What if I get hurt on the job—what happens then?”

I have taken to asking cab drivers, frequent fliers, and store clerks what they think about health care reform. Their responses (and worries) are enlightening—if a bit scary. The amount of misinformation and downright hogwash that passes for fact is amazing. And the upcoming elections do little to enhance the level of discourse.

In fact, the fiction foisted upon the American public on TV and radio during this season of debate is downright disgusting. So I have taken to the streets, and I'm calling on you to do the same.

No legislation is perfect—certainly not anything as complex as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, aka Health Care Reform, signed into law by President Barack Obama on March 23 of this year. But on balance, the new measure makes important progress in expanding access and coverage, countering egregious business practices (such as dropping enrollees who get sick), helping reduce waste, and enhancing primary care infrastructure.

So it is time we have a debate based on fact, not political rhetoric. It is time we demand accountability from our politicians. It is time we, as physicians, become patient advocates and help set the record straight about what health care reform does—and does not—entail.

I developed some talking points. (If you want to come up with your own, it may help to revisit the key provisions and time frame of health care reform at a site such as <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/policy/federal/hcrleg2010.html>.)

Now, I tell as many people as possible that health care reform will:

- extend coverage to people who are currently underserved (some 32 million additional Americans)
- guarantee that Americans who have preexisting conditions or become seriously ill will have access to health care
- provide coverage for routine preventive services
- enhance end-of-life care.

Don't allow politicians and others to reduce health care reform to sound bites and catch phrases. Take the time to raise the discourse. Provide patients with the information they need from a source they trust—their family physician.

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THE JOURNAL OF FAMILY PRACTICE

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