



## **Now is the Time for Meaningful Health Care Reform**

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Comprehensive health care reform is a political and social challenge that has escaped this country for more than 30 years. This year, divergent interests are coming together with a promise to finally fix our health care system. There are proposals in Congress right now that would provide high quality, affordable health care and still give people the choice of keeping their current insurance plan and primary care doctor.

As a family physician, I see the effects of our broken health care system every day in Chicago. It is heartbreaking and frustrating to treat patients who are uninsured or can't afford coverage or are denied private insurance coverage due to their age or pre-existing conditions. It is difficult seeing my patients struggle to make a choice between the health care they need and deserve or food on the table.

Access to health care in our current system is precarious at best.

Meaningful and sustainable health care reform is possible if Congress passes legislation that gives everyone in the United States access to a patient-centered medical home. A medical home means their primary care doctor will ensure they get the care they need, when they need it and where they need it.

What does it take to build a system that works? First, we need legislation that really covers everyone. This legislation must include requiring insurance companies to sell plans to all applicants, regardless of family history and pre-existing conditions. Patients must be able to renew their health coverage even if they've become ill.

Second, legislation must ensure that once people have a health insurance plan, they also have access to a primary care physician. This is a double-edged sword. Why? There is a looming shortage of primary care physicians to meet the need. The reformed system must reward primary care physicians for their work if we want medical students to choose careers as primary care physicians. Primary care physicians are needed to provide and coordinate comprehensive for patients and seamless care with other health care providers with a focus on wellness and prevention.

The Affordable Health Choices Act now being debated in the U.S. Senate can bring the health care system we need. This proposal would ensure affordable health coverage for everyone and help in developing the primary care workforce that we will need to provide that care. Now it is our duty as physicians, patients and voters to let our senators know we support this legislation.

Congress must act now! Any legislation passed this year will still take years to truly make an impact. Programs will be developed; patients will start to enroll into coverage plans; medical homes will be designed and implemented. But it will be at least five to seven years before today's medical students are practicing physicians. We need reform now so that today's students will choose to be primary care physicians tomorrow.

It's time to solve the health care crisis. This is not a political game. Lives have been lost. We must build a uniquely American solution that controls skyrocketing preventable health care costs and gives our patients peace of mind with a primary care physician as a partner in their health care.