



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
INTERNAL MEDICINE | *Doctors for Adults*[®]

February 27, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the 126,000 internal medicine physicians and medical students who belong to the American College of Physicians (ACP), ACP commends you and your Administration for a budget outline that reflects the urgent need to fix our ailing health care system. The concept of establishing a reserve fund to facilitate reform that expands access to health coverage shows a serious commitment to meeting the challenges that accompany reform.

We fully support the eight principles proposed in the budget outline for modernizing and transforming health care: Protect Families' Financial Health, Make Health Coverage Affordable, Aim for Universality, Provide Portability of Coverage, Guarantee Choice, Invest in Prevention and Wellness, Improve Patient Safety and Quality Care, and Maintain Long-Term Fiscal Sustainability.

While we will refrain from commenting on individual line items until the further detail that is planned for your complete budget request to Congress is available, the College does want to convey its appreciation for your intent to dedicate funding to account for "additional expected Medicare payments to physicians" over the next 10 years. We are grateful for Congressional action to avert steep cuts generated by the untenable Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula in recent years. However, preventing the cuts without adjusting the underlying formula contributed significantly to an accumulated debt that has stymied a long-term fix to the SGR problem. Accounting for the funds provides a foundation for an enduring solution.

We share your belief that the solution to be built on that foundation should be responsible as well as comprehensive and include reforms to fundamentally realign physician payment incentives to support better outcomes of care. We believe that the budget should allocate sufficient resources to improve Medicare payments for primary care physicians to make primary care competitive with other career and specialty choices. Such reforms should take into account the large body of research that shows that primary care consistently is associated with better outcomes and lower overall costs of care, fewer preventable hospital admissions and emergency room visits, more effective use of drug therapies, and overall lower per capita Medicare expenditures, much of which will show up in savings in Medicare Parts A and D.

The College looks forward to working with your Administration and Congress to enact comprehensive health reform, which includes a fix to the Medicare physician payment formula. While this effort will involve tough decisions, it is essential for patients, the economy, and our country.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey P. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Jeffrey P. Harris, MD, FACP
President