

GUEST EDITORIAL

Perspectives on Health Care Reform

Elizabeth Hoppe, OD, MPH, DrPH



The ultimate structure and potential impact of health insurance reform legislation remains uncertain. And we know from the sage philosopher, Yogi Berra, that “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.” So instead of making predictions or discussing a snapshot of current legislative initiatives, I will take this opportunity to share some of the work

being done to frame the “ideal future” of a health care system. Many of us in optometric education are accustomed to approaching complex problems with optimism and idealism, so keeping our eyes on the best and most desirable future can serve as a valuable guide.

I would like to share the perspectives of two national associations, both of which are dedicated to improving and protecting the health of the public, while supporting collaboration between health disciplines. I am proud to say I am a member of both organizations. I find the information I receive from the associations to be extremely helpful, and I would encourage every optometric educator to learn more about what these organizations offer.

The first perspective comes from the National Academies of Practice (NAP). The NAP is an interdisciplinary organization of health care professionals representing ten disciplines. The NAP’s mission is to serve as distinguished advisors to health care policymakers in Congress and elsewhere through the development of public policy papers, interprofessional dialogue, and interprofessional forums. Through its analysis process, the NAP has put forth a recommendation for an accountable, coordinated health care system that promotes and supports a variety of health care professionals in providing integrated, patient-centered health care and optimal health care outcomes across all care settings, types of care, and throughout a patient’s lifespan.

The NAP has several recommendations regarding the steps necessary to achieve an accountable, coordinated health care system in the United States. Most relevant to optometric education are recommendations for federal investment in “cross-professional” training within health professions schools and through graduate internships and the development of interdisciplinary teams.

The second perspective comes from the American Public Health Association (APHA). The APHA is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world and has been working to improve public health since 1872. The APHA represents a broad array of health professionals striving to promote the scientific and professional foundation of public health practices and policy. The Association has 27 primary sections that represent major public health disciplines or public health programs, including vision care professionals.

Through its analysis and advocacy processes, APHA also has developed recommendations for health care reform. APHA’s policy states that we must ensure coverage for quality, affordable health care for all, emphasizing that this means covering the more than 46 million individuals who are uninsured, while also improving the quality and safety of the health care system, and building a modern health information infrastructure.

The association makes a number of recommendations for reform, including several that have the potential to impact optometric education. The APHA asserts that health reform legislation must significantly increase support and funding for programs that provide loan repayments, scholarships, and other grants for the training of public health personnel, primary care physicians, nurses, and other health providers. It must also improve the distribution and diversity of health professionals in medically underserved communities, as well as ensure there is a capable health workforce able to provide care for all Americans and respond to the growing demands of our aging and increasingly diverse population.

I don’t know what to expect as we continue to observe the legislative process, but I do know I have the opportunity to stay informed about what is happening in Washington. And I also have the opportunity to work toward a brighter future, where we are able to make these recommendations a reality through our ongoing interprofessional collaborations here at WesternU.