

Congressional Support for PARCA Widens

Editorial Staff

Since last reporting on the Patient Access to Responsible Care Act (PARCA) in the January 1, 1998 issue, the number of cosponsors for the bill in the House of Representatives continues to grow, despite the opposition's efforts.

Since Congress returned from its winter recess, 12 more representatives have agreed to cosponsor the bill. There are now 222 cosponsors in the House as we go to press.

Further, only one of the 211 cosponsors who had signed-on to support the bill before Congress' winter recess have dropped their support (see next paragraph). This is significant, because politicians on both sides of the PARCA issue agreed that the battle over the bill would be won or lost during the recess.

First Casualty of the War on PARCA

Unfortunately, not all the news regarding PARCA is positive. Representative Jim Bunning (R-KY), a former Hall of Fame baseball player, officially removed his name as a cosponsor of the legislation on February 4.

With the opposition's efforts to kill PARCA beginning to heat up, it is extremely important that those in the chiropractic profession must continue to support the members of Congress who have already agreed to support the bill.

If your member of Congress has already agreed to cosponsor the bill, contact them and thank them for their efforts. If your senator or representative has not joined the support of PARCA, contact them and request that they do so. For more information, visit the ACA's political action website (<http://www.acapac.com>) to help obtain the support needed to pass this important legislation.

Economic Study Predicts Only "Nominal" Premium Increases

Those opposed to the passage of PARCA have based their argument on the belief that the legislation would increase the costs of managed care plans so dramatically that small businesses would be unable to provide health care coverage. A study¹ just released by Muse & Associates, a health policy and strategic planning consulting firm in Washington, DC, refutes that claim. While there would in fact be a slight increase in managed care premiums, the insurance rates would rise by only a fraction of what the managed care industry and other opponents had originally suggested it would cost.

Using the best evidence gathered for their summary of the PARCA bill, Muse & Associates estimated that national premium expenses would average only between 0.7 and 2.6 percent if the bill is passed and signed into law, a great deal less than the 23 percent average increase the bill's foes had been contending in a report released last year. This would mean, for example, that a patient paying an

average of \$160 per month for insurance coverage would see their premiums increase only to between \$161.12 and \$164.16.

The Muse study confirms earlier findings by the Lewin Group, which showed that the majority of the measures in PARCA would increase the average consumer's insurance premiums by about one dollar a month. The Muse study is also the first to review all 23 provisions of the PARCA legislation.

Previous studies which had been used by the managed care industry to undermine the bill's passage were based on only brief reviews of a few sections of the legislation. Furthermore, those previous studies were based on misinterpretations of the actual legislative intent of the PARCA provisions. It is those incorrect assumptions which had some reports estimating that the overall cost impact of PARCA would be as high as 90 percent.

"The 'big guns' of the managed care industry and other opponents of PARCA have been using outrageous and inaccurate cost estimates to undermine this important bill," stated Edward L. Maurer, DC, the chairman of the board of the American Chiropractic Association. "In reality, \$1-\$4 is a very small price to pay for the expanded choice and increased quality health care consumers will receive through these long-needed patient protection provisions."

Georgia Representative Charlie Norwood, the bill's author, is even more ecstatic about the study's findings. "That's a mighty small price to pay for regaining the freedom to choose your doctor, hospital and treatment," said Norwood. "And when you consider that also includes the ability to hold managed care plans legally responsible for damages caused by denying care, it's the deal of the century."

Reference

1. Nystrom SV, Muse D, Goldenberg D, Portner G. The Health Premium Impact of H.R. 1415/S. 644, The Patient Access to Responsible Care Act (PARCA). 1998; Muse & Associates, Washington, DC.

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