

Health Care Reform: 2009

A Physical Therapy Perspective

Revised: September 12, 2009

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) strongly supports efforts to reform the United States health care delivery system to improve coverage, access, and quality of care and reduce unnecessary costs. APTA stands ready to work with the U.S. Congress and President Obama's Administration to meet this policy challenge in 2009.

APTA supports the following policy principles for health care reform:

- Enact systematic health care reform that provides patient guarantee issue, renewal, and choice and access to affordable health care for all individuals from the health care provider of their choice.
 - Guarantee issue ensures that patients would not be denied meaningful coverage due to pre-existing conditions.
 - Guarantee renewal would ensure patients would not have their coverage terminated due to a change in health status.
 - Guarantee choice would ensure that patients have a choice in their health care insurance.
- Reduce health care disparities across race, gender, geographic area, setting, and health status.
- Ensure that rehabilitation services, provided by licensed health care professionals, are an essential element of a standard benefits package in any proposal to reform the insurance delivery system. Rehabilitation is a critical part of the health care continuum and ensures that individuals can return to the highest function possible in their homes and communities.
- Enact insurance reforms that:
 - eliminate arbitrary limits on annual or lifetime benefits;
 - prohibit cost shifting by increased co-payments, deductibles, and/or premiums; and
 - ensure non-discrimination on benefits or providers.
- Eliminate existing Medicare payment policies that impede patient access to cost-effective outpatient rehabilitation services provided by physical therapists including:
 - permanently repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula in the Medicare physician fee schedule and replace it with inflationary indices to accurately reflect costs in delivering health care services;
 - permanently repeal arbitrary outpatient therapy caps on services; and
 - eliminate the unnecessary referral requirement or certification of the plan of care for patients to access outpatient physical therapy services. This barrier to patient access delays care and adds additional costs for patients and the health care system.
- Ensure that all models of care delivery, such as medical homes and accountable care organizations, enhance patient access to rehabilitation services.

- Ensure that any policy set forth regarding bundling payments for post-acute care services meet the following criteria:
 - Bundled payments should not be implemented into law or regulation without full evaluation of its feasibility and advisability as a payment model for post-acute care services. APTA recommends demonstration projects to further evaluate this payment methodology and for the gradual phase in of policies that change the payment system from post-acute care.
 - Patient safeguards should be established to ensure patient choice and access to the full range and continuum of post-acute and outpatient care.
 - Post-acute care should be defined as Part A services within the first 30 days post discharge from an acute care hospital stay delivered by inpatient rehabilitation facilities, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and/or long-term acute care hospitals.
- Enhance initiatives to develop a national strategy that will ensure that an adequate health care workforce exists to meet the needs of patients.
 - Enable physical therapists to fully participate in current initiatives, such as the National Health Services Corp, as well as any new programs established to provide workforce incentives to recruit and retain qualified health care professionals in underserved areas.
 - Expand federal funding for clinical education, fellowships, and faculty development in physical therapy.
- Reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens on physical therapists to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in delivering health care to their patients at the right time and place.
- Eliminate referral for profit arrangements in health care.
- Include prevention and chronic care management programs and services to reduce health care costs or to manage those costs in an efficient and effective fashion.
- Expand health information technology incentives to all health care professionals to ensure greater efficiency, improve patient care, facilitate outcomes measurement, and enhance collaboration and integration between all members of the health care team across patient settings. Payment incentives, training and education should be phased in over a period of time to enhance compliance and effectiveness.

Originally approved by APTA's Government Affairs Committee on May 2009. Revised on September 12, 2009 by the Government Affairs Committee.

For more information, please contact Kelly Lavin, Director, Federal Government Affairs, American Physical Therapy Association at advocacy@apta.org or 703-706-8533