

Med Schools Urged to Teach Medical Home

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER

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PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS'
ORGANIZATIONS

Medical schools should devote more time to teaching students about care coordination, population health, and electronic health records so that students will be ready to be a part of the patient-centered medical home, according to a new report from four groups representing primary care physicians.

In a joint principles document, the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, and American Osteopathic Association outlined how all medical schools can provide students with a foundation in the elements of the medical home, regardless of whether they plan to pursue a career in primary care.

The groups recommend that students learn about the principles of the medical home, such as being a personal physician, leading a team of providers, providing care for the "whole person," coordinating care across the health care system, improving the quality and safety of care, and providing enhanced access.

For example, as part of the principle of whole-person orientation, the groups recommend that medical students practice motivational interviewing as way of encouraging behavioral change. They also recommend that students work with health coaches who care for patients with complex conditions.

In learning about care coordination,

the groups call for students to become familiar with electronic health records, e-visits, and electronic billing; learn to access online medical information; and use health information technology in their own continuing education.

The report also recommends that medical schools teach physician payment methodologies and current trends in health care costs.

While medical schools today teach some elements of the medical home model, such as the continuum of care, there's not a focus on the medical home itself, said Dr. O. Marion Burton, president of the AAP and associate dean for clinical affairs at the University of South Carolina, Columbia.

He said that he expects medical schools to embrace the recommendations for teaching the medical home, but that it will take 3-4 years for most institutions to do so. The first step, which could take a year or more, will be to recruit new faculty members with experience with the medical home concepts. The next step will be to determine exactly how to teach the model, whether through lectures or more hands-on training, or some combination of approaches. And it may take another year to integrate the subject matter into the existing curriculum, he said.

The major sticking point may simply be finding the time in an already packed curriculum, said Dr. Michael S. Barr, an ACP senior vice president. The challenge for medical school officials, he said in an interview, will be figuring out what to take out of the current curriculum while still ensuring that physicians are prepared to enter residency training. ■

Florida Judge Says Affordable Care Act Is Unconstitutional

BY ALICIA AULT

A federal judge in Florida ruled on Jan. 31 that the Affordable Care Act is unconstitutional.

The ruling and the direction of his opinion were expected.

The suit was filed in March 2010 by 20 states; in the last month, another 6 states joined. Two private citizens and the National Federation of Independent Business also joined the suit. The parties challenged the law's requirement that individuals purchase health insurance and also the ACA's requirement that Medicaid eligibility be expanded to offer insurance to more Americans.

In his 78-page decision, Judge Roger Vinson of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida in Pensacola said that the individual mandate exceeds Congress' regulatory powers.

Judge Vinson also ruled that the whole law would have to be struck down, as the individual mandate could not be separated out from the ACA, in part because the legislation appeared to be built on a framework that required all the pieces for it to work.

"If...the statute is viewed as a carefully balanced and clockwork-like statutory arrangement comprised of pieces that all work toward one primary legislative goal, and if that goal would be undermined if a central part of the legislation is found to be unconstitutional, then severability is not appropriate," he wrote.

While the judge agreed with the plaintiff's argument that the mandate exceeded Congress' authority, he did not agree with their proposition that the government was overreaching through its proposed Medicaid expansion. The

plaintiffs failed to provide ample evidence of its claims, Judge Vinson ruled. As a result, "the states have little recourse to remaining the very junior partner in this partnership," he wrote.

The White House characterized the ruling as outside the mainstream of judicial thinking and said that the Administration would continue implementing health reform while it appeals. During a background briefing, senior administration officials said that Judge Vinson's decision that there was no severability in this case flew in the face of legal precedent.

And, on the White House blog, Stephanie Cutter, a senior adviser to President Obama, wrote, "This decision is at odds with decades of established Supreme Court law, which has consistently found that courts have a constitutional obligation to preserve as a much of a statute as can be preserved. As a result, the judge's decision puts all of the new benefits, cost savings, and patient protections that were included in the law at risk."

After the ruling, House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) said in a statement that the decision "affirms the view, held by most of the states and a majority of the American people, that the federal government should not be in the business of forcing you to buy health insurance and punishing you if you don't."

Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, which filed a brief on behalf of the federal government, said in a statement, "Judge Vinson's decision is radical judicial activism run amok, and it will undoubtedly be reversed on appeal."

Most court watchers expect the case to end up at the Supreme Court. ■

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