

# Panel Seeks Citizen Input on Reforming Care

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WASHINGTON — American health care could be in for the world's largest customer satisfaction survey as the U.S. Citizens' Health Care Working Group seeks comments nationwide on how to reform the system.

"In order to make health care work for all Americans, we need to hear from all Americans," said working group member Rosario Perez, a registered nurse and vice president of Mission Integration and Outreach Services for CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care in San Antonio. "We want to hear from individuals across the country. That means your parents, your relatives, your coworkers, and people in your community." Perez spoke at a briefing sponsored by the Citizen's Health Care Working Group.

Established by the 2003 Medicare Modernization Act, the 14-member panel will collect as many comments and suggestions as possible before April 15. Submissions will serve as the basis for panel recommendations for Congress and President Bush to consider next spring. The recommendations will address costs, care affordability, and quality improvement.

"Despite increases in medical care spending that are greater than the rate of inflation, population growth, and Gross Domestic Product growth, there has not been a commensurate improvement in our health status as a nation," according to the law that established the working group.

Among areas of interest highlighted by the working group are consumer concerns about health care delivery, benefits

that should be provided, how health care should be paid for, and acceptable trade-offs to ensure broad access to services.

The Health Care Working Group will collect comments via its Internet site ([www.citizenshealthcare.gov](http://www.citizenshealthcare.gov)) and through "town hall"-style community meetings planned for every state. The effort is the bipartisan brainchild of Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.).

The press briefing was held in the same Senate room as the 1912 hearings on the

sinking of the Titanic, and Sen. Wyden said the U.S. health care system could suffer a similar dire fate "if something dramatic isn't done to save it."

Sen. Wyden suggested citizen input may engender systemic change that has stymied Congress for the last 6 decades. A "citizens' road map" for change could help "overcome the feeding frenzy by special interests," he argued.

The panel is made up of health care professionals, economists, benefits experts,

and advocates from across the country, and includes Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt. The group is chaired by Randall L. Johnson, head of corporate benefits for Motorola Inc.; vice chair is Catherine McLaughlin, Ph.D., a health economist at the University of Michigan. To jump start the national discussion, the group developed a 30-page "Health Report to the American People," which summarizes the current state of U.S. health care. ■



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pay in out-of-pocket costs for a particular plan? And do they want to stay in traditional Medicare and choose a separate drug plan or switch to a Medicare managed care plan that includes prescription drugs, physician services, and hospital care?

### New Head for FDA Women's Health

Dr. Kathleen Uhl has been named director of the Office of Women's Health at the Food and Drug Administration. Dr. Uhl, a family physician and a captain in the U.S. Public Health Service, most recently served as a supervisory medical officer in the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. "Kathleen brings a breadth of professional experience, as well as a strong science background and passion for women's health, to her new position," said FDA Acting Commissioner Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach. Dr. Uhl's experience includes clinical practice, basic science and clinical research, drug application review, drug safety oversight, and women's health issues. She also has dual faculty appointments at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in family medicine and internal medicine.

—Mary Ellen Schneider