

Welcome to the Hub!

Americans are scrutinizing the nation's health care system as never before, and the next few months will be critical ones in determining its future structure, function, and processes. With this challenge in mind, APhA will be bringing to you each month the Hub on Health Care Reform, providing the news and information you need to best support your profession during this important time.

The bottom line question is this: When

several hundred pharmacists and student pharmacists gathered on April 6 during APhA2009 in San Antonio for the APhA Political Leadership Breakfast. Gonzalez continued, "We're not just talking about the future of pharmacy but the future of your family and your community."

Gonzalez, who is in his sixth term in the U.S. House of Representatives, strongly urged his audience to get their elected leaders to come and visit their pharmacy.

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President Barack Obama signs a bill reforming health care, will you have done everything you can to influence its provisions concerning pharmacy and medication therapy management (MTM)? Will the new law elevate our profession's clinical status and recognize the capabilities of today's pharmacist, or will our future remain detrimentally tied to the declining reimbursement structures of medications and devices?

To provide the needed tools to APhA members and all of pharmacy, the Hub keeps you up to date on the who, what, why, when, and how of health care reform (HCR). Combined with daily updates on the APhA website pharmacist.com and APhA's weekly Focus e-newsletter, the Hub provides a foundation and a catalyst for the profession's messages to Capitol Hill and the Obama administration about pharmacists and all we can do, not just in dispensing medications, but in making these powerful agents work as intended.

Are you ready to do your part? Then read on!

Gonzalez: The time is now, the future is in your hands

"If you don't get involved, someone else will be making decisions for you and your family and your profession." With those words, keynote speaker Congressman Charles A. Gonzalez (D-TX) energized

He emphasized the importance of relationships and how they can be helpful in getting leaders to recognize what is important to pharmacists. He acknowledged that attendees may have different issues within the pharmacy community and emphasized the need to identify the important common legislation on major issues, including HCR: "I see it as a great opportunity for you as pharmacists." He predicted that the legislation coming out of the House later this year will include a public option for health care insurance.

HCR: Pharmacists in right place at right time

Pharmacy has a unique window of opportunity at this point in the profession's history, one that we cannot afford to squander. The stars are all aligned in our favor, but victory on the legislative battlefield requires more than preparation and luck—we now need to bring our political forces to bear and make our message heard.

With that in mind, just what is at stake in the HCR debate? In short, potentially everything. In many previous federal forays into health care legislation, pharmacy has been able to take an "opt out" approach—that is, to strike a sepa-



HCR checklist:

What you need to do NOW!

- Access the Government Affairs page of pharmacist.com and take a look at all the resources available to APhA members.
- Click on Get Involved and sign up to become an APhA Advocacy Key Contact. You will be contacted by e-mail when votes are approaching on issues critical to you and your patients.
- Read Helpful Hints for Contacting Legislators and Conducting an In-Pharmacy Visit with an Elected Official.
- If your membership in APhA is current, visit the Legislative Action Center for the latest updates on HCR and other important issues facing pharmacy.
- If you're not a current APhA member, go over to the Member Center and click on Renew/Update Account so that you can join! Only through a united front can pharmacy expect to be heard in Washington.
- Once your visit to pharmacist.com is finished, take a few minutes to identify patients in your practice who know the importance of your MTM skills. Enlist their support in contacting your Senators and Representative about HCR and the topics you've read about on the APhA website.



HUB ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

provides readers with practical information on health care reform issues, what APhA is doing to keep pharmacists' important role front and center with decision makers, and simple ways for pharmacists to participate in the processes that will determine the structure, function, and processes of a reformed American health care system. To offer suggestions for future content, ask questions, or make comments, send an e-mail message to APhA@gvtaff@aphanet.org.



ACOs? Medical homes? What's that about?

Log on to pharmacist.com to find out.

rate deal for reimbursement of medications and pharmacists' professional services. With the current debate centering around a new approach to reform, continuing the status quo is not an option. Furthermore, the current economic environment is forcing reassessments in the way dollars are spent, and much of the dispensing part of pharmacists' current duties could be implemented as computerized prescriber

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order entry systems linked to robotic dispensing systems in pharmacies staffed largely by pharmacy technicians.

Pharmacy must now work to make sure the profession is included as a full-fledged member of the health care team, one vested with responsibility for improving medication use and thereby advancing patient care.

As a result of sound decision making over the past couple of decades, pharmacy is in a great position to make the argument for inclusion of pharmacists as clinical partners of physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals. The nation's third largest profession now requires a doctoral degree for entry, and pharmacists are well prepared for a wide variety of clinical, patient care, disease management, research, and other nontraditional roles that go beyond the usual image of the pharmacist as solely a purveyor of medications. Demonstration projects and proof-of-concept studies such as the Asheville Project and the APhA Foundation's Project IMPACT trials have established the effectiveness of pharmacists' services in helping patients manage the chronic diseases that are at the heart of health care services to the nation's burgeoning population of senior citizens.

Medications are the predominant modality for prevention and treatment of disease, and pharmacists' services—in the form of MTM—are needed to ensure optimal patient outcomes. By collaborating with other members of the health care team, pharmacists can make the differ-

ence between medications that achieve their intended purpose and ones that cause adverse effects and negative outcomes, or are not taken at all.

A decade and a half have passed since Congress debated health care reform. Once this year's debates are finished, the issue is not likely to come up again for years. Now is the time. Will we respond and grasp the opportunity?

APhA: Ensuring pharmacy's seat at the HCR table

Incoming APhA Executive Vice President and CEO Thomas E. Menighan, BPharm, MBA, speaking recently with *Today*, responded to what he called an "outcry" over the fact that pharmacists weren't at the table when the first of several public forums on HCR was conducted at the White House on March 5. He explained that this initial forum, while important, was just the start of the process, adding this pledge to the profession: "APhA will promote your value on the Hill and, together with your state associations, in statehouses. We will partner with any and every organization interested in optimizing your value to patients."

In visits to Capitol Hill and discussions with key players in the HCR debate, APhA hears troublesome comments, such as, "Nurses can coach patients to be adherent; we don't need pharmacist-provided MTM services." "Pharmacists just use an

algorithm to do medication management; medication management can be done by computers," and "Pharmacists are just looking for more money. Patients don't need help managing their medication therapy." These are the kinds of obstacles the profession is up against in making sure that lawmakers know just what pharmacists are doing to improve medication use and advance patient care.

While APhA is working to ensure pharmacy's seat at the HCR table, here are some supportive actions you can take today to help build the profession's case:

- Educate policymakers: Do not assume that Congress, President Obama, or his administration understand that pharmacy is the third largest and most accessible health profession; that pharmacists play a critical role in providing accessible, affordable, and quality health care for patients; or that more fully using pharmacists can further improve quality of care and decrease health care costs. Do not assume that they appreciate that by not addressing the nation's medication use problem we will miss a huge opportunity to improve the health of hundreds of thousands of patients.
- Advocate for the future of your profession: Do you want to be part of the future of health care? Do you want to be part of the solution? Or do you want the practice to remain as it is today—"unrecognized" by people who don't know what they don't know.
- Take action: Contact your Senators or Member of Congress (visit the Legislative Action Center on pharmacist.com) and report your and your patients' experiences on the Obama administration's healthreform.gov website.

