

In this case, time will hurt rather than heal

By PERSHARON DIXON, M.D. - A SUN HERALD FORUM

As a doctor for medically underserved children, I see the effects of our broken health care system every day. The majority of children that I see at the community health center where I work are either uninsured or are underinsured even though the many of them have at least one working parent. The economy has impacted the kind of work the parents of my patients are now doing, and how much work they are offered. In many cases the status is part-time which does not allow for full benefits if any at all. When a parent loses or isn't offered health insurance, many children go without check-ups and necessary medical care.

Denying health coverage to children carries great long-term risk to children and to the larger public, both from a health care and an economic position, as chronic and acute conditions go unchecked, resulting in a potential serious and costly medical response.

In both rural and urban settings, the hospital emergency room often becomes the primary care office for families with-out health care coverage. Recently one of my asthma patients spent an afternoon in the ER for an attack that could have been avoided had there been resources for a maintenance visit and medications.

I have a unique perspective because I am a provider in two national types of programs. As part of the Children's Health Fund's national network of child health projects and as a provider in at Coastal Family Health Center, I know that this situation is not unique to Mississippi; it is nationwide and calls for a national answer.

I watched the health care summit last week with anticipation, because health care reform holds the potential to help thousands of children and families in my community and state. Currently in Mississippi, there are more children on Medicaid (342,800) or uninsured (112,000) than who have insurance from their parents' employer (336,100).

While watching, it struck me that Republicans and Democrats agree on more issues than they disagree on.

The health care system is broken and needs to be fixed. Everyone agrees on that point. Republicans and Democrats also agree on getting rid of annual and lifetime limits on

treatments, rooting out waste and fraud, and extending coverage for dependent children up to age 26, to name just a few mentioned over the six hours.

So why is the future of health care reform in doubt?

If it is because of the size of the bill, I hope my political representatives can see that the size of the problem is big as well. Surely, as professionals in the area of lawmaking, they can continue to work through and modify the content while major reform is established.

If it is because of the process, I would hardly be able to tell a lawmaker how to write and pass a bill, just as I wouldn't want a non-medical person to tell me how to treat a sick child.

It seems that we are arguing about philosophical differences that I, along with so many others, are tired of. The same old disagreements exist as always. It's time to move forward.

There is common ground in health care reform. It must be done now; Mississippi's children can't wait for Congress to start over or, even worse, to do nothing and risk the health of an entire generation.

Persharon M. Dixon, MD, MBA, is medical director of Coastal Family Health Center and medical director of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Children's Health Project. The Mississippi Gulf Coast Children's Health Project is a partnership between The Children's Health Fund and Coastal Family Health Center.



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