



Guest column: Health-care reform needs more thought

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In March, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law. Access and coverage are discussed extensively in the act, but there is still little detail about how health-care delivery will be impacted by reform — that is left to future federal rule-making.

The implementation timeline for the act begins now and stretches until 2015. One thing is for certain — during the next five years, in one way or another, this act will affect us all. Positive points include:

- Millions more Americans will be covered by health insurance.
- Insurance reforms will eliminate restrictions on pre-existing conditions, lifetime limits and guaranteed issuance.
- There is recognition that reimbursement to health-care providers from government sources like Medicare should be more equal across states. Wisconsin currently receives less per Medicare patient than the average state.
- Pilot projects are tying payments for health-care services to quality outcomes rather than the current "pay per procedure."
- The debate has improved understanding of how health care works.
- There is a focus on wellness and prevention. More needs to be done, however, to empower patients to make wise health choices.

There also are areas that need further discussion. They include:

- How health systems pay for reform. We need more action on payment based on value — quality outcomes, affordability and excellent patient service.
- How Americans pay for reform. The changes involve the health insurance industry but potentially affect all citizens and taxpayers.
- Who will care for the newly insured. Strategies in addressing potential physician and nurse shortages need to be considered.
- End-of-life care. Further discussion and public awareness around end-of-life care is needed to ensure patients' wishes are respected at all stages of their lives.

In a series of articles during the next several months, we will look at how this new act will impact health-care access, labor shortage and wellness. We encourage you to learn more about the act. Helpful information can be found on the Kaiser Family Foundation website, www.kff.org.

Nick Turkal, MD, is president and CEO of Aurora Health Care, a comprehensive health care system dedicated to helping people live well.

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