



## Guest column: Health-care reform pushes accountable-care facilities

By Nick Turkal • August 5, 2010



The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act creates several changes to the nation's health-care system. While it is complex, we are beginning to see indications of what the impact of the legislation may be for you as a patient, business owner, employee or citizen.

For those without health-care coverage, the main benefit of the legislation will be greater access to coverage. Congressional estimates state that 32 million Americans currently without health-care coverage will gain it through the act.

In addition to expanded coverage, some of the most encouraging aspects of reform relate to improving health-care quality. Last year, President Obama visited [Green Bay](#) and held it up as a national example of achieving better quality with fewer dollars. That means using health-care dollars for best practices that result in better outcomes, lower mortality and fewer complications.

For example, the act provides for investments in wellness and prevention. Free preventive services in [insurance plans](#) and greater access to preventive services for Medicare patients are provisions that can make our nation healthier and ultimately reduce cost. A provision with the greatest potential to be transformational is a pilot related to what are being called accountable-care organizations, a new concept we will hear about in the months ahead. The organizations are health-care networks able to provide — and help patients coordinate — a continuum of care that includes primary care, inpatient and outpatient hospital care, home care and pharmacy and other services.

The idea is pretty simple: If all the doctors who take care of you — your primary care physician, specialists and your hospital — worked together and their financial fates were somehow connected — almost like business partners — you'd get better care and it

wouldn't cost as much. There's good evidence to suggest that physicians who have a financial stake in your medical costs are [more efficient](#) and more effective.

The act encourages the creation of accountable-care organizations as a way to test their viability. I believe this is the future of [health](#) care. Aurora has been practicing this model of care for years. It's the basis for the finding in a recent study of health-care costs in Northeastern Wisconsin that Aurora BayCare Medical Center has the lowest costs among Green Bay hospitals.

If you're interested in more information on reform, I've found the Kaiser Foundation website, [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org), to be a helpful resource.

**Editor's note: This is the second in a series of guest columns discussing the health-care reform act.**

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