



May 12, 2009

The Honorable Allyson Schwartz
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Schwartz:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), representing 128,000 internal medicine physicians, residents and medical students, I am writing to express our endorsement of the Preserving Patient Access to Primary Care Act of 2009 and to congratulate you on your leadership on this critical issue. I also write to thank you for meeting with me, and the College's senior staff leadership, to share ideas on how to ensure patient access to primary care.

As I noted yesterday, as a practicing general internist myself in a small Georgia town, I have been fortunate to experience the joy of working, in a collegial and collaborative fashion with nurse-practitioners, physician assistants, and other physicians on our health care team, to provide the best possible outcomes for our patients. My own experience supports what the evidence also tells us: primary care is correlated with better health status, lower overall mortality, and longer life expectancy, and patients with primary care physicians have lower health care expenditures, as stated in the findings section of the bill.

Regrettably, though, too few young people are choosing careers in primary care medicine, and many established primary care physicians have left the field or are considering doing so in the near future. As a result, the United States is facing a shortage of 45,000 or more primary care physicians.

The Preserving Patient Access to Primary Care Act offers a comprehensive approach to reversing the growing primary care shortage. It reforms Medicare payments to recognize the value of primary care; authorizes payment for care coordination services; and establishes a new payment model for primary care practices that have demonstrated that they have the capabilities to be qualified patient-centered medical homes. It requires that the Medicare program take into account the impact of primary care in reducing overall Medicare costs, including savings associated with preventable hospital admissions, in making budget neutrality adjustments.

The legislation will also increase the pipeline of primary care physicians and other providers by providing new scholarship and loan repayment programs for primary care service in critical shortage areas and facilities; creating a grant program to educate students about primary care careers; expanding Graduate Medical Education primary care residency positions, reducing barriers to training in office-based primary care; and authorizing higher funding levels for the Title VII health professions programs and the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). As I mentioned yesterday, I was trained through the NHSC and can speak to the positive impact it has had on me and on my rural community.

Primary care is the best medicine for better health and lower costs, and the Preserving Patient Access to Primary Care Act is the best medicine for curing the growing crisis in primary care. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the policies it proposes are included in comprehensive health reform legislation.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph W. Stubbs". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Joseph W. Stubbs, MD, FACP
President