Physician Negotiations With Health Plans Should Focus on Patient Quality of Care

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Work Stoppages by Physicians Should Not Be Allowed

(Washington, DC): Legislation is needed to enable physicians to negotiate jointly with health plans on quality-of-care issues, according to a statement released today by the American College of Physicians - American Society of Internal Medicine. But organizations of physicians that engage in such joint negotiations should agree to certain "boundaries" so that patients' interests remain paramount at all times. Such boundaries should include strictly prohibiting strikes, slowdowns or other work stoppages that could hurt patients and limiting negotiations to quality issues.

The ACP-ASIM issued the statement in response to the decision June 23 vote by the American Medical Association's House of Delegates to form a collective negotiating unit to counteract the power of managed care organizations.

"Physicians should be able to jointly negotiate with managed care plans. Patients' interests must remain paramount at all times," said ACP-ASIM President Whitney Addington, MD, FACP. "Such negotiations are consistent with the obligations of professionalism as long as the purpose is to allow physicians to negotiate to change health plan policies that may adversely affect patients' access to high quality health care."

The ACP-ASIM supports the intent of pending legislation in Congress to allow physicians to engage in such joint negotiations. However, ACP-ASIM has not taken a position supporting or opposing any specific group's decision to form a collective negotiation unit.

"Physicians should be prohibited from engaging in price fixing or other anti-competitive actions," said Dr. Addington. "We will seek to strengthen pending legislation in these areas."

The ACP-ASIM also said that residents and other physicians-in-training should have a means to address working condition issues with their training institutions, including grievance procedures. "However, we are opposed to creation of a joint negotiating organization for residents," said Dr. Addington.

ACP-ASIM is in the process of drafting a detailed position paper that will further elaborate on its views on how joint negotiations should be conducted, how the negotiation unit should be
selected, and the boundaries that should be placed around joint negotiations by physicians. The paper will be available in mid-July.

ACP-ASIM is the nation's largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician group. Membership comprises more than 115,000 internal medicine physicians and medical students. Internists are the major providers of medical care to adults in America and treat more Medicare patients than any other medical specialists.

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