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Angry Docs Say Proposed Government-Run Health Care Plan Will Drive Physicians out of Medicine

Friday, June 26, 2009

By Pete Winn, Senior Writer/Editor



President Barack Obama appears at the American Medical Association meeting in Chicago, June 15, 2009. (AP photo/Charles Rex Arbogast)

(CNSNews.com) - You do not have to be a brain surgeon to see that government-run health care will bode ill for doctors and medicine, says Dr. David McKalip of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons.

But McKalip, who happens to be a St. Petersburg, Fla.-based neurosurgeon, predicts an eventual mass exodus of doctors out of medicine if Congress passes a health care reform bill that contains a mandatory government insurance option.

“I think you’ll see an incremental change where doctors will be squeezed so hard, they will simply start migrating out of medicine,” McKalip said at a unique virtual town meeting broadcast on the Internet Thursday evening.

“The older doctors, 55 or 50 they will leave early. The other ones who are mid-career, mid-generation, young 40s – Well, I’m already supplementing my income in other ways so that I can support my family. I’ll practice as long as I can, but I can’t practice by paying to work.”

McKalip, who is president of the Florida Neurosurgery Association, was one of more than 20 speakers – including two doctors in Congress, Reps. Tom Price (R-Ga.) and Phil Gingrey (R-Ga.) – who “took to the air” from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m EDT to complain about President Obama’s government-run health insurance plan.

“Unfortunately what’s coming is a government takeover of medicine,” McKalip said. “The goal is to ration care. Whenever the government takes over medicine, they always ration care. When you bring this up to the proponents, they always say that ‘Rationing happens anyway, we just want the government to do it.’ They never deny that there will be rationing.”

Doctors will be forced to ration for the government, he said.

“They will be forced by being paid less if they don’t comply with certain bureaucratic protocol set up in a committee,” he said. “They will be forced if they don’t do what the hospital tells them to do – because there is a big plan to move all the money into the hands of the hospitals, so that doctors will have to do what they are told, and as it turns out, the hospitals are doing what the government tells them to do.”

Doctors are already being told how to practice medicine, McKalip said, because of Medicare/Medicaid.

“Doctors feel hopeless because they don’t see any way out of the system without becoming a sort of slave to the system,” McKalip said.

Low reimbursements from Medicare/Medicaid are already forcing some doctors to pay expenses out of their own pockets, just to keep practicing medicine.

“There was an oncologist today who told me that last month he worked just as hard as he had ever worked, did all the things he had to do to take care of his patients – but he had to go to the bank and take out \$3,000 to pay his practice costs because there were cuts in chemotherapy payments – and the way they were paid,” McKalip said. “That doctor is going to go out of business – and then where will patients get their cancer care?”

McKalip said he personally has had a Medicare/Medicaid patient who wanted to go to the biggest cancer care center in the region.

“They wouldn’t take her because she had Medicaid,” McKalip said. She had coverage, he said, but the government wouldn’t allow him to make up the difference between what Medicaid would pay and what the facility cost.

“Even if I form a private charity in my county, which I’m doing, to pay the difference the government forbids that patient to use private money to pay the difference to get the care she deserves,” McKalip said.

It’s time to “take back medicine for patients,” he added.

"I think Americans need to stand up and say, 'There is another way – no third-party control. No government control. Give the patients the control and we can solve these cost problems.'"

On July 17, the physicians group plans to conduct hundreds of events across the country protesting the proposed health care reform.