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Health care: Dr. Cynthia Weaver

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- Should the government tax health benefits?

The SDSMA supports ending the tax exclusion for spending on employer-sponsored health insurance and establishing refundable, advanceable tax credits to help people buy insurance. Further, the SDSMA supports equal tax treatment for payment of coverage. That includes the exemption of both employer and employee contributions toward individually owned insurance from FICA and federal and state employment taxes.

Should consumers have a public option, the government plan, for health insurance?

The idea of a "public option" for health insurance has been proposed, but we haven't yet seen a firm plan. The SDSMA would oppose any public option that would propose to base payments off Medicare or Medicaid or essentially expand the programs. The federal reimbursement structure has resulted in payments being substantially less than the actual cost of providing medical services. The system results in a constant balancing act, especially in rural areas. That leads to problems with access to care; doctors must make tough choices to limit the number of Medicare and Medicaid patients they see to keep their doors open. Until the reimbursement system is fixed, we don't favor more public payer options that could only worsen current problems.

Should the government require employees to buy health insurance?

The SDSMA supports a person's right to select his or her own individual health insurance plan and believes this can be integrated into the goal of achieving universal coverage and access to care. The SDSMA supports expanding affordable health care coverage with guaranteed issue in the context of an individual mandate with tax credits or vouchers for those who can't afford coverage.

Should employers be required to provide insurance or pay into a fund if they don't?

The SDSMA supports individually selected and individually owned health insurance as the best track to obtain health insurance coverage. We also support and advocate for a system where employer-provided coverage is still available. While the SDSMA supports replacing the federal income tax exclusion of employer-provided health insurance, we believe health insurance expenditures should continue to be exempt from federal payroll tax.

Should the government increase tax on items identified as unhealthy, such as pop, liquor or junk food?

The SDSMA believes that health system reform should include some incentives for preventive care and proper management of chronic diseases.

Should the government limit payments to hospitals?

Health care facilities already do take reduced payments through the Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement systems, which often result in reimbursements below the actual cost of patient care.

What do you think of the overall state of health care?

The SDSMA believes there's an undeniable need for health system reform. We continue to see growth in the rise of health care costs and the number of uninsured, and the problem is made worse by decreasing employee benefits and a growing number of self-employed. Therefore, the sharp focus we're seeing on health care issues presents an opportunity to address many of the problems doctors face daily in providing high-quality care to their patients. But it also raises genuine concerns that well-intentioned but poorly informed policy decisions made in the short term could have long-term consequences for both patient and doctors.
