



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

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January 3, 2017

The Honorable Donald Trump
President-Elect of the United States of America
Office of the President-Elect

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President-Elect
Office of the President-Elect

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear President-elect Trump, Governor Pence, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA), representing nearly 130,000 osteopathic physicians and medical students, is committed to ensuring a high quality, patient-centered, cost-efficient health care system for our nation. With all fully licensed U.S. physicians holding either a DO or MD degree, today osteopathic trained physicians (DOs) represent nearly 1 in 5 U.S. physicians, and 1 in 4 medical students. DOs practice in every medical specialty and in every state. The osteopathic approach to medicine is best expressed as a partnership between physicians and their patients to improve health, promote wellness, and enhance prevention.

As the incoming Administration and Congress consider potential changes to the health care system, the AOA would like to emphasize that as part of this philosophy, it is our priority to ensure access to affordable care and coverage for our patients.

While great progress has been made over the last decade to advance such efforts, we also recognize and support the need to improve the current system. We therefore urge you to consider any approach to reform that maintains stability of insurance markets, minimizes uncertainty, and encompasses the following priorities. We offer the AOA's assistance and expertise as you introduce and debate these efforts:

- Foundation based on prevention and care coordination: The AOA recognizes primary care as the cornerstone to effective patient-centered care and coordination. The AOA continues to support use of health information technology as an important tool for achieving care coordination, but encourages Congress and the Administration to revisit the current mandates for use of flawed systems that interfere in the physician-patient relationship.

With the osteopathic philosophy to care focused on the needs of the ‘whole person’ (mind, body, spirit, and environment) the AOA strongly supports delivery models like the patient-centered medical home that enhance and promote the foundational role of primary care physicians and emphasize the provision of coordinated care across the health care spectrum. We urge the Administration and Congress to incentivize and broaden opportunities for physicians to participate in more of these models across the payor landscape in order to continue the transformation towards a value-based health care system. As well, coverage of evidence-based, preventive services without cost-sharing to patients should be preserved as a requirement of insurance plans.

- The patient-physician relationship must be preserved: The establishment and ongoing maintenance of stable physician-patient relationships is critical to patient adherence and achievement of desired outcomes. Physicians’ clinical judgments, in partnership with their patients, should be the primary driver of care decisions.
- Development of a strong physician workforce is critical: The osteopathic medical profession has long committed to ensuring care for patients in rural and underserved communities, as evidenced in part by the establishment of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine in these very areas. Yet current restrictions on post-graduate training have resulted in shortages in many areas of primary and specialty care. To ensure patients are receiving the best quality care and attention that they deserve, the AOA supports new and innovative models for the distribution of graduate medical education (GME) funding. Additionally, payment models should incentivize physicians to provide care in rural and underserved areas, specifically in those specialties of greatest need.
- Coverage and access to care must be ensured: Whether their coverage is through a private or public payor, any patient should have coverage for, and access to, a core set of essential benefits and a broad network of physicians to include primary and specialty care across all aspects of medical and behavioral health. We firmly believe that patients should not be charged higher premiums nor denied coverage based upon their pre-existing health care conditions or past medical history, sex, disability, race or ethnicity, family history, or gender. Lastly, there should be a safety net of care that is accessible to the most vulnerable in our nation of all ages who lack the resources to access coverage directly themselves.

The AOA looks forward to working with the new Administration and the 115th Congress on the above, and other, health care priorities. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact me or Laura Wooster, AOA’s Interim Senior Vice President for Public Policy, at lwooster@osteopathic.org or (202) 349-8747.

Sincerely,



Boyd R. Buser, DO,
President