

March 2005 - 75 Reasons to Improve our Health Care System

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Hospitals across Kansas are diverse in size, but face the same difficulties. From the high-tech, 400-bed Salina Regional Medical Center to the 25-bed critical access Logan County Hospital in Oakley, Kansas hospitals are making a difference and saving lives, while facing countless challenges. In February I completed a visit to each of the hospitals in the First Congressional District. There are 75 hospitals to be exact - the most hospitals of any congressional district in the country. What I learned and saw in each of these hospitals, from the large to the small, was that health care providers are fighting to provide adequate care despite personnel shortages, the ever increasing costs of providing that care, and a growing amount of government bureaucracy and red tape.

In order for our small towns to continue to exist, local residents must have access to hospitals and health care providers. Having a local primary care physician, as well as a place to go for health care services, is critical to rural residents. Communities have shared with me the difficulties they have in recruiting and keeping health care professionals. I continue to support efforts to ensure the availability of health professionals through legislation such as the Nurse Reinvestment Act, which provides incentives for nurses to work in shortage areas and the J-1 Visa waiver program which brings doctors to underserved areas.

In addition to personnel needs, costs are one of the biggest prohibitive factors in Kansans' receiving care. We must take steps now to lower costs and reform the health care system. No longer can we continue to throw money into the system without addressing the underlying reasons of high costs. An effective, accessible primary care system is instrumental in improving health outcomes, keeping health costs down, and helping people lead healthy, productive lives. Hospitals and primary care doctors are the gateway to accessing health care and should be adequately reimbursed for the care they provide.

All along the way, doctors and hospitals shared that reimbursements should not only be adequate, but timely. Enormous bureaucratic burdens that result in delayed payment for services contribute to costs that are eventually passed on the patient. In addition, the excessive red tape and regulations, such as HIPPA, divert resources from patient care, drive up costs incurred by health care professionals and discourage doctors from practicing in our communities. Health care professionals should be able to spend less time on paperwork and more time on patients.

Health care has been one of my top priorities while serving in Congress. My visit to each hospital in the district reinforces my belief in the dedication and talent of Kansas health care providers and the quality of the care they provide. However, it also demonstrates the need to provide the tools they need to improve the access and affordability of health care. I will share with my colleagues in Congress the stories and frustrations expressed by the 75 hospital administrators, the doctors, nurses and their patients as we work to find solutions to the challenges facing our health care system.