



Making Pharmacists Eligible for NHSC Loan Repayment Can Narrow the Quality Chasm

While the pharmacist is educated to be a team player, their medication management knowledge and skills need greater integration into community-based primary care service organizations. Given that poorly-managed medications cost our healthcare system billions of dollars annually in terms of waste, poor outcomes, and yes, even death, it is clear that making sure the pharmacist is part of the team is good organizational management.

A new piece of legislation just introduced in the United States Senate will help address and reduce the risk of poor medication management by making pharmacists eligible to participate in the loan repayment program of the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). The “Pharmacist Student Loan Repayment Eligibility Act of 2011,” introduced by Senators Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Jack Reed (D-RI) and Mark Begich (D-AK), is a great first step in assuring that every American, especially those in underserved areas, will have access to a healthcare team that utilizes the strengths of each one of its members to make sure that the patient and our nation benefit from high-quality, team-based, patient-centered care.

Throughout most of the last decade, state and federal policy makers used the Institute of Medicine Quality Chasm series of reports as evidence for determining the strengths and weaknesses of individual members and our healthcare team as a whole. Using statistics showing poor return on investment; poor health outcomes for individuals; increasing pressure from chronic illness; lack of access to care; and inability to pay for care, states crafted healthcare bills aimed at increasing access to

insurance. Federal policy makers did the same and upped the ante by identifying disease prevention, health promotion and access to primary care as a foundation for a reorganized healthcare system. Both state and federal approaches recognized that one health professional could not be successful in implementing this new approach; an entire team would be required to improve both health and economic outcomes. Each team member would contribute his or her strengths to the effort resulting in better coordinated care, improved quality and reduced costs.

The “Pharmacist Student Loan Repayment Eligibility Act of 2011” authorizes eligible entities to seek the integration of a pharmacist into their primary care teams. This will be facilitated by making pharmacists eligible to participate in the National Health Service Corps loan repayment program. The intent of the legislation is to ensure that patients in underserved areas will have access to high-quality, patient-centered, team-based primary care. In federal legislation; federally-supported health programs; and community-based care models, the integration of the pharmacist is recognized as essential for improving patient health outcomes and organizational economic outcomes. Making pharmacists eligible for NHSC loan repayment provides eligible entities an important recruitment tool for this essential team member.

For more information about the legislation and the many issues supporting the legislation, including the National Health Service Corps Web site, go to <http://capwiz.com/taacp/issues/alert/?alertid=25355501>.