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Contact: Rebecca Morgan
Director of Communications
703-739-2330 ext. 1032
202-280-8068 (cell)

AACP Supports New Healthcare Reform Legislation

Alexandria, Va. – The United States is unique in that our total healthcare spending fails to increase our access to high quality care. Special populations, including the elderly and the chronically ill, frequently become bleak statistics resulting from a lack of care-coordination. Efficient and effective management of their medications is not part of their daily care or at important points when they are particularly vulnerable, such as being discharged from the hospital. The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) took the first steps toward reforming our healthcare system into a true system focused on improving the quality of care to which all Americans have access.

With Tuesday's release of the "Affordable Health Choices Act," the Senate HELP Committee provides ample recognition that reorganizing our healthcare system will require clinical decision-making to use a growing evidence-base that suggests patients benefit from care that is team-based, supported by informatics, and centered on the needs of the patient. This patient-centered approach to care, in the proposed legislation, for the first time will increase patient access to medication therapy management services.

"The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) applauds the Committee's inclusion of this important quality improvement component," said William G. Lang, AACP vice president of policy and advocacy. "By bringing the clinical knowledge of the pharmacist to the decision-making process, medication therapy management improves the quality of care patients receive and the prescribers provide. This is the first real legislative recognition of what many state Medicaid programs, the Indian Health Service, self-insured employers, and a growing number of federally-qualified health centers already know - bringing the clinical pharmacist onto the team improves medication adherence, improves health outcomes and can save money. Most importantly, patients and prescribers gain new knowledge to manage care more effectively and efficiently."

While most of the work associated with building support for including medication therapy management into specific areas of this legislation was done through collaboration with other pharmacy and healthcare organizations, the evidence-base is mostly the result of the work of the faculty at our member colleges and schools of pharmacy.

Research, some supported by the National Institutes of Health, shows that integrating the services of a clinical pharmacist into almost any healthcare setting, including primary care and medical homes, improves medication-related health outcomes. Keeping patients healthy through improved management of their medications reduces costs associated with expensive, life-saving interventions in emergency rooms and hospital admissions and readmissions related to poor management and care-coordination. Pharmacy faculty are the real reason this legislation includes so many provisions that support improving quality through medication management.

This legislation sets an important research agenda in which pharmacy faculty can engage. Health professions education will need to focus more on increasing the professional's knowledge of caring for geriatric patients and working interprofessionally to move toward the patient-centered, team-based system envisioned in the legislation. Improving what care gets delivered and how will be the focus of a new comparative effectiveness agenda. Continuing to build the evidence-base will be important to gain buy-in among private and payers for inclusion of medication therapy management. AACP member institutions look forward to continuing their research and advocacy that will improve the quality of care all Americans receive.

About AACP

Founded in 1900, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) is a national organization representing the interests of pharmacy education and educators. Comprising 112 accredited colleges and schools of pharmacy including more than 5,500 faculty, 50,000 students enrolled in professional programs and 3,900 individuals pursuing graduate study, AACP is committed to excellence in pharmacy education.