

June 24, 2010

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

As you prepare to mark up the FY2011 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill, please take into consideration America's critical need for primary care physicians.

Specifically, we ask that you appropriate at least \$125 million to the Primary Care Training and Enhancement program administered by HRSA and strongly urge you to allocate those funds in accordance with the current authorizing statute (Public Law 111-148) to ensure that training funds are available to all primary care disciplines on the basis of merit and national need. Furthermore, if Congress must pass a long-term continuing resolution, we encourage you to include language requiring that funds be allocated in accordance with the current authorizing statute, so as to minimize any program disruptions.

Primary care improves health and lowers cost

Primary care represents the centerpiece of our nation's health care system. Primary care physicians care for chronically ill patients and provide preventive services. Patients with primary care physicians have better health status, longer life expectancy and lower health care costs. For the poor, the uninsured and the elderly, primary care often functions as a safety net, serving as the first and often their only contact for medical care and treatment.

In short, health care outcomes and costs are closely linked to the availability of primary care physicians.

In the next ten years the demand for primary care services in the US will increase dramatically due to aging baby boomers, the obesity epidemic and, most notably, the expanded coverage created by the new health care reform law. Yet the U.S. is facing a shortage of as many as 42,000 primary care physicians within a decade.

As noted in the fifth annual report of the Advisory Committee on Training in Primary Care Medicine and Dentistry, over the past 40 years, Primary Care Training and Enhancement

programs “have transformed the medical and dental landscape with their increased emphasis on the education and training of the primary care workforce. These programs have developed and expanded education and training programs for primary care providers and promoted diversity in the workforce. In addition, the programs have ensured that health professions curricula respond to the changing demands and emerging health needs of the U.S. population, including addressing the disparities in health outcomes of vulnerable groups.”

The Primary Care Training and Enhancement program enjoys broad bipartisan support in large part because it is the chief source of funds available to primary care training and education and has a proven record of success through grants to institutions to plan, develop and operate accredited professional training programs. Under the new authorization, grants also will be available for training in new competencies, such as patient-centered medical homes, and to develop training programs that promote interdisciplinary, team-based models for the delivery of patient care.

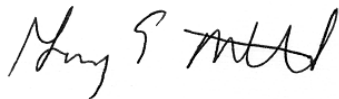
Primary care is not a single discipline

The expired authorization allocated more than 60 percent of appropriated funds to family medicine. The new authorization recognizes that general internal medicine and pediatrics are equally important in primary care. Except for a 15 percent set-aside for physician assistants training, the new authorization permits funds to be awarded competitively across all primary care disciplines. This will ensure that scarce federal dollars support the most meritorious training programs.

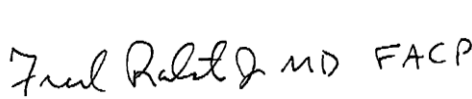
Now is the time for a robust and sustained investment to meet America’s primary care needs. Increasing numbers of elderly are entering the age of highest risk of chronic disease and millions of previously uninsured Americans will need primary health care services. We strongly urge you to utilize the Primary Care Training and Enhancement program to help meet these critical challenges.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We stand ready to assist you however we can.

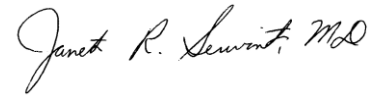
Sincerely,



Gary E. Rosenthal, MD
President
Society of General Internal
Medicine



Fred Ralston, Jr., MD, FACP
President
American College of
Physicians



Janet Serwint, MD
President
Academic Pediatric
Association