

## **Delegates solidify MAG's positions on health care reform at HOD**

The Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) held its annual House of Delegates (HOD) meeting in Savannah on October 16-17. In terms of key outcomes, the HOD delegates affirmed MAG's position on key national health care reform measures.

The HOD adopted resolutions that call for...

- Repealing the sustainable growth rate (SGR) in a manner that eliminates the accumulated cuts and bases future Medicare payments on the Medicare Economic Index.
- Giving patients and physicians the right to privately contract for medical care in any situation, regardless of third party payer and without penalty.
- Supporting legislation that would require 90 percent of the individuals under 200 percent of the federal poverty level to be enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP before those programs are expanded.
- Opposing health insurance reform that includes a public option or a "trigger mechanism" that would enact a public option in a way that establishes a new or expands an existing government-run health care plan to compete with the private sector.
- Increasing payments to physicians who practice in primary care specialties.
- The concept of a medical home that is consistent with AMA's "Joint Principles of the Patient-Centered Medical Home."
- Supporting health care reform legislation that promotes individual ownership of health insurance policies.
- Supporting an individual's right to purchase health insurance with tax-free dollars, regardless of employment status.
- Supporting legislation that provides tax credits and subsidies to individuals who cannot afford to purchase health insurance.
- Promoting defined contributions that allow employers to provide pre-tax monetary contributions to employees to purchase private health insurance in lieu of an employer-sponsored health care plan.
- Opposing legislation that would allow individuals who are not lawfully in the U.S. to obtain health care benefits that are funded in whole or in part by the government.
- Affirming MAG's position of opposing statutory mandates that employers provide health insurance benefits to their employees.
- Opposing mandates that require individuals to secure health insurance.

In addition, the HOD passed a resolution that calls for the American Medical Association to withdraw its unqualified support of H.R. 3200.

In an electronic survey on health care reform that was conducted during the meeting, 79 percent of delegates said they are opposed to a "public" health insurance option, while 72 percent said "no" to an individual mandate for a government-approved health insurance plan.

In his state-of-the-association address, MAG's now Immediate Past President M. Todd Williamson, M.D., said of the association's efforts in the national health reform arena that, "We have been consistent in our principles...there is no place for big government between the patient and their physician."

Dr. Williamson added that, "We have carefully analyzed and taken into account the opinion of our members in the context of MAG policy, and we have never compromised our message."

During his installation speech, incoming President Gary C. Richter, M.D., said that he sees great opportunities to re-position MAG in the coming years.

"I believe this is especially true when it comes to Georgia's newer physicians," he stated. "Some physicians simply don't understand the challenges we face, nor do they understand the role that MAG plays to protect their interests. That gap represents a challenge, but it also represents an opportunity."

Dr. Richter outlined his plans to establish a task force that will be charged with engaging physicians in the state who are employed by large, multi-specialty practices. He announced that Rob Schreiner, M.D., the executive medical director for the Southeast Permanente Medical Group, will lead that effort.

He also said that he was forming a second task force to identify ways for MAG to interface with other physician organizations "in a meaningful way, to develop a strong working relationship as we move forward." He announced that group would be led by Lawrence Sanders, M.D., and Sudhakar Jonnalagadda, M.D.

"We need to connect the dots in terms of what's transpiring in Washington and the future of the profession we love," Dr. Richter said. "The context for the health care reform debate seems clear to me...those Americans without insurance need the security that's associated with health insurance coverage, while those who already have health insurance and who are happy want peace of mind."

He concluded by imparting that, "I believe that we need to reform the current private health insurance market. In addition, we need to maintain the patient-physician relationship...for me, that's not negotiable."

Former American Medical Association President Donald J. Palmisano, M.D., delivered the keynote speech, "Quo Vadis, AMA? Where are you going, AMA?"

Dr. Palmisano said, "The detailed principles of ethical science-based medicine and the unequivocal policy of the AMA House of Delegates take precedence over undefined general words of those pushing the juggernaut of drastic changes to the health care system."

Beyond national health care reform, the delegates adopted a resolution that calls for the creation of a permanent funding source for trauma care that includes direct compensation for physicians as a priority for Georgia's General Assembly.

Go to [www.mag.org/about/house-of-delegates.shtml](http://www.mag.org/about/house-of-delegates.shtml) for a detailed summary of the actions that were passed at this year's HOD meeting.