



# The Politics of Caring

By Sheila Abood, PhD, RN

## Getting Involved in Health Care Reform

*The Health Care Working Group and the Medicare Informed Choice Act are at the forefront.*

For nearly 60 years, Washington has tried to come up with a way to provide health insurance for all U.S. residents; however, achieving good, affordable health care for all continues to be one of the nation's most persistent problems and remains an elusive goal. Today, as more people are worried about a lack of health insurance, access to quality services, and sharply rising costs, individuals have a new opportunity to make their voices heard about health care problems and to be part of the solutions that will affect the health care system.

The health care reform debate is once again underway thanks to a federal law, which authorized the formation of a bipartisan Citizens' Health Care Working Group to address these issues. This group of 14 citizens—including three RNs—from diverse backgrounds across the nation has been charged by Congress to develop a plan of action that will result in new laws and strategies to create a health care system that works for all Americans. To accomplish this goal, they are seeking public involvement and are providing a unique opportunity for individuals to tell their leaders what works and what doesn't about the health care system—and what should be done—based on their own experiences.

Starting with the release of a concise report by the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, the *Health Report to the American People*, which outlines the current status of the health care system and sets the stage for public debate, the goal is to have citizen participation at community

meetings in every state as well as online. The crux of the debate will be about the tough choices that must be made to transform the current health care system into one that actually works and about finding solutions to the problems in our current system. After hearing the ideas and sugges-

Transforming the current health care system into one that actually works.

tions presented by individuals across the country, the Working Group will develop preliminary recommendations for further discussion.

There will be additional opportunities to provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations before the final recommendations are presented to the president and to members of the congressional committees with jurisdiction over health care, who must then conduct hearings on the recommendations. The ANA supports this initiative and encourages all nurses and their families to take part in this unprecedented discussion of health care reform and to make their voices heard. For additional information, to read the report, and to provide your own comments online, go to [www.citizenshealthcare.gov](http://www.citizenshealthcare.gov).

### MEDICARE INFORMED CHOICE ACT

As Medicare Part D, the new Medicare prescription drug program,

gets underway, Medicare beneficiaries are faced with a confusing array of complicated choices. In recent months, the 42 million Medicare beneficiaries have been deluged with information that requires them to sort through competing benefit plans and decide which will save them the most and cover the drugs they take.

The ANA, along with other patient advocacy groups, is concerned that Medicare beneficiaries may not have clear and adequate information to navigate the maze of choices involved in selecting the right drug plan, which could result in possible dire financial and health care consequences. This concern has been heightened by the fact that inaccurate information in the description of plans was included in the *Medicare and You 2006 Manual* distributed this fall by the Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS).

To address these concerns, the ANA is supporting the Medicare Informed Choice Act of 2005 (H.R. 3861), a bill introduced by Representatives Pete Stark (D-CA) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) that contains common-sense changes to the Medicare prescription drug program and will help seniors make appropriate choices. The act is a simple bill with three important beneficiary protections. It would delay late enrollment penalties, protect against bad plan choices, and protect employer-provided benefits. The ANA supports the Medicare Informed Choice Act as a small, time-limited step that would protect Medicare beneficiaries and ease the pressure of the first year of the new Medicare drug program. ▼

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