



J. James Rohack, MD, President

February 24, 2010

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Health system reform is one of the most important and complex issues on the national agenda. Difficult issues require our elected officials to go the extra step to address documented problems and unsustainable trends in our current health care system.

What we cannot and will not support is stalemate. Our message to those attending the Summit is: You know full well the problems facing patients and the physicians who treat them. Focus on the provisions that improve patient access to high-quality medical care; remove barriers to care through common sense insurance reforms; reduce health system costs; and sustain the vital patient-physician relationship.

One sure-fire way to significantly reduce health system costs is to expand and adopt medical liability reforms. Many respected budget and policy experts have long concluded that defensive medical procedures, prompted by the threat of litigation, add substantial costs for individuals, private and public payers. The current legal environment runs counter to efforts to improve value and appropriate utilization of health care services. A mix of proven medical liability reforms and new initiatives will correct this perverse legal environment, benefit patients on several levels, and ensure that injured patients are fairly and promptly compensated. It has taken far too long for the greater good to prevail over the interests of the trial bar in our nation's capital.

Permanently repealing the long-outdated Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula is yet another way that Congress can address health care reform in a fiscally responsible way. At this moment, political brinksmanship is eroding access to care and creating needless anxiety for Medicare and TRICARE patients and their physicians.

For years, Democrats and Republicans have acknowledged that the Medicare SGR formula is bad policy. The longer Congress procrastinates on tackling this issue the higher the price tag will be for the American taxpayer. Before Congress and the federal government incur new

commitments under the reform umbrella, they most surely should honor existing obligations to America's seniors and military families.

Finally, at the heart of any successful health system reform legislation must be continuing recognition of the need to remove barriers to patient choice. Reform proposals must assure that treatment decisions are made by patients and their physicians, not insurers or government officials. Patients and their physicians should have the freedom to enter into private agreements without penalty by third party payers or the government.

Physicians, not unlike the broader community of voters, have sharply divergent views about pending reform plans. Yet, the overwhelming majority of physicians know without doubt that major reforms to our nation's health system are necessary. For that reason, the AMA will continue to work with Congress and the Administration to secure vital improvements to pending proposals.

We strongly encourage Congressional leaders from both political parties and the Administration to work diligently and expeditiously to refine and pass meaningful reforms that empower patients and their physicians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. James Rohack, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" being particularly prominent.

J. James Rohack, MD