

## NextGen Healthcare Reform Forum

*In response to President-elect Barack Obama's call for widespread discussion about solutions to the U.S. healthcare crisis, NextGen Healthcare sponsored a 90-minute virtual community forum on Dec. 20, 2008. More than two dozen thought leaders participated, representing healthcare delivery providers and private-sector service firms. Eighty-five percent of the participants had 10 or more years experience in their field. A wide range of subjects was discussed, each focusing on how to improve care delivery and contain spiraling expenses. Central themes emphasized affordability, access and active care management. The group expressed a general optimism when asked whether or not they believe meaningful healthcare reform can be achieved in 2009, with more than half of the respondents rating the likelihood of legislative action at "7" or higher on a scale of 1-10.*

Virtually all participants urged access to a **basic level of care for all** and an emphasis on **preventive care**. As one attendee commented, "We need to design a 'health care system,' not a 'sick care system.'" To achieve this, healthcare must (1) refocus attention on primary care providers rather than specialists; (2) coordinate care and adopt a medical home model; (3) accelerate coverage for electronic visits; and (4) expand pay-for-performance or pay-for-outcomes initiatives. Success will require that the reimbursement structure be realigned to better support preventive and primary care, and that the industry increase efforts to attract physicians and physician extenders.

Strategies to improve affordability of care – an inherent benefit of reducing costs – included (1) **redesign of the payer system** to decrease overhead and administrative burdens shouldered by providers, guarantee universal coverage for primary care, and reward quality rather than volume; (2) support for accelerated **adoption of health information technology** (HIT) through incentives and subsidization, mandate clinical data exchange, and establish interoperability standards like HL7; and (3) **elimination of duplicative services** via use of electronic health records and data exchanges.

Furthermore, participants advocated involvement of patients in active care management, with one citing the need to access “the untapped potential of the patient.” Of top concern was obesity, management of chronic conditions and lack of preventive care. Tactics suggested by attendees included (1) **widespread education** about lifestyle choices (e.g., “Hollywood” PSAs, school programs); (2) providers writing “**information prescriptions**” at each visit addressing wellness and disease management issues; and (3) a **carrot-and-stick approach to coverage** that includes cost reductions for wellness activities and “taxation” for high-risk behavior. “We need to adopt three rules,” commented one attendee. “Help people do more for themselves, help people ask for the care they need and help people say ‘no’ to care that will not improve their lives.”

In short, attendees encouraged the Obama administration to **move support for healthcare delivery downstream**: to primary care providers and patients themselves. Focus should be placed on preventive services, as well as early and ongoing chronic disease management. Providers and patients – rather than payers or drug companies – should be incentivized and rewarded for quality and improved outcomes. Expanded support for HIT adoption will enhance coordination of care and reduction of costs (especially duplicative services), while advancing implementation of best practices.

In summary, participants assessed the importance of each of the healthcare reform initiatives discussed during the session on a scale from 1-10. The top eight – with the average score across all respondents – are:

- Focus on preventive care (9.4)
- Change the focus to wellness (8.9)
- New IT to create efficiencies (8.8)
- Focus on P4P and evidence-based care (8.6)
- Reduce administrative burden (8.6)
- Increased accountability for participants (8.6)
- More focus on outcomes (8.5)
- Ensure affordable healthcare for everyone (8.5)

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