

Don't let health care bureaucrats interfere with the doctor-patient relationship

By Devon Herrick

March 28, 2012

The controversial new health care law is facing renewed scrutiny as the Supreme Court deliberates on its constitutionality. Debate between its supporters and detractors is likely to continue in the coming months — if not years. The Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) is a rarely discussed component of the law, but one that deserves your attention if you value the quality of the medical care you receive.

Medicare needs to be reformed; the most recent report by the Medicare Trustees predicts that Medicare funds will be depleted by 2024. To solve that problem, the new health care law created IPAB, a board of 15 people who are not elected and will not be held accountable by the taxpayers or Medicare beneficiaries. Difficult decisions will be made, but the patients won't be making them, the doctors won't be making them and even the legislators who control the funding won't be making them.

IPAB is a board with the power to make recommendations to limit or lower reimbursements for Medicare providers beginning in 2014. If Congress does not adopt the recommendations or meet targeted spending reductions of its own, IPAB's recommendations will automatically become law. This is a massive delegation of congressional power and a vast overreach of bureaucratic authority.

The new health care law gives IPAB the power to impose indiscriminate price controls. Decisions about the medical care that is available to seniors will be made by 15 bureaucrats charged with slowing the growth of Medicare spending. While the law prohibits rationing of care or reducing benefits, it does not prohibit policies that would ultimately have the same effect. Faced with the limitation on rationing, the board will have few options other than reducing payments to physician and hospitals. Seniors already face difficulty finding primary care physicians who will treat them. IPAB will exacerbate that problem. The American Medical Association reports that the cuts could reduce patients' access to care.

When the politicians in Washington give bureaucrats the power to make decisions about cutting reimbursements for medical providers, choice and competition disappear, and patients bear the consequences.

To Washington, it's all about the numbers. It should be about the people. IPAB is a hasty mechanism created to cut costs. In the end, patients will suffer.

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