



Health care for undocumented immigrants unresolved by upheld law

By: David Schechter

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DALLAS - If millions more Americans get health insurance, will they turn their back on safety-net hospitals like Parkland and get their care elsewhere?

That's what **Devon Herrick** worries about. He's a health economist opposing the newly upheld law.

If that happens, he said some hospitals will lose out on gaining paying customers. However, they will still be saddled with the cost of caring for undocumented patients, who have no insurance.

That means taxpayers will have to pay for their care.

"Places like Parkland or charity care hospitals may find that the patients with coverage don't show up and use their facility," Herrick said. "And the ones without coverage may show up and use their facility. So they may end up with all the cost and none of the revenue."

For hospitals serving a disproportionately high number of indigent patients, the government reimburses some of the expense. But, as more people get insurance, those payments to hospitals like Parkland will be cut by 25 percent.

Steve Love is president of the DFW Hospital Council, which supports the Affordable Care Act. But he agrees, losing those payments could expose hospitals to problems as they continue to treat illegal immigrants.

"Yes, that would certainly have a financial impact, in a negative way, on Parkland," Love said. "On the other hand, many of these people who are now covered under Medicaid might still go to the Parkland, because they're familiar with it as a hospital they visit."

Though the Supreme Court has spoken, the Affordable Care Act itself does not pay for the care of undocumented workers. But county hospitals will still be caring for them, making this one of the last large groups in our society that don't have health insurance.