

Everyone has a role in health-care reform debate

By Tom Sadvary

As the only locally owned, nonprofit hospital system in the Northeast Valley, Scottsdale Healthcare is dedicated to serving the community we call home.

Since 1962, we've evolved to meet our community's changing medical needs and witnessed numerous changes in our nation's health care system.

The summer of 2009 may be remembered as the summer that America boldly took on health reform ... again.

As a hospital executive whose career has spanned several attempts at health care reform, I am hopeful that the approaching discussion in the U.S. Congress will lead to an improved system.

I encourage community conversation about health care in the United States. What needs to be changed? What can be retained?

There are many good things in our current system that will continue to be important in delivering quality care, regardless of the debate in Washington. These are happening right here in your community and will continue, thanks to the compassionate caregivers who want the best outcomes for their patients.

The critical challenge will be to find a way to improve quality, access and cost. As such, the following items are fundamental to a national health reform plan:

GUEST Commentary

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1. Research and technology: The United States is a leader in research and technology, and we must continue that investment.

The Virginia G. Piper Cancer Center at Scottsdale Healthcare is home to groundbreaking clinical research studies of new therapies for treating cancer.

We take the fight against cancer personally, looking at ways to use science, technology and personalized care to target tumors in each individual patient.

Treatments are tailored to a patient's particular disease characteristics rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

By identifying the causes of the disease at the molecular level, it is possible to prescribe the right drugs, in the right amounts, at the right times.

2. Transparency of quality data: Good information is the gateway to good care. It increases patient safety and reduces unnecessary costs and hassle.

The U.S. Department of Health and Hu-

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man Services publishes quality outcomes for all hospitals online, and Scottsdale Healthcare also provides performance measures on 21 nationally-recognized quality indicators and practices on its Web site — www.shc.org.

Where available, data is provided, comparing Scottsdale Healthcare with Arizona and U.S. averages.

3. Coverage for the uninsured: Scottsdale Healthcare works every day to provide high quality care for all patients, but we also see firsthand the impact of our nation's broken

health insurance system. More than 1 million Arizonans are uninsured.

When they seek care, they are sicker and often with chronic conditions that makes providing care more complicated and costly to all of us. Everyone — individuals, employers, insurers and government — must play a role in health coverage.

Experience has taught us coverage for all will be our toughest challenge.

4. Appropriate funding for health care providers: The sharpest divide in the health care reform debate is creation of a public insurance plan to compete with private insurance.

The current House bill would create a government-run, public plan that would tie provider payments to Medicare rates, which do not cover the actual cost of services.

Hospitals in Arizona are reimbursed only 89 percent of their cost for treating Medicare patients. The result is higher rates for everyone else covered by private health insurance plans.

Health care will only become more affordable and accessible if everyone plays a part in reforming our system. Government cannot be the solution in itself.

Patients, providers, employers and insurers must all play a role in improving care and reducing costs.

Editor's note: Tom Sadvary is president and CEO of Scottsdale Healthcare.