

Health Policy Pulse • May 18, 2009

This week's edition of the Chandler Chicco Companies-DC Health Policy Pulse includes:

- **The Rollercoaster that Is Health Reform**
- **Blue Dog Democrats Step In**
- **CDC Gets a New Director**
- **Health Insurance Mandates**
- **CCC Perspective:** What's at stake with DTC web communications
- **Healthcare Playmaker Profile:** Rep. Michael Burgess, MD, (R-TX-26)

Last week, the Administration's healthcare reform efforts started off with a bang when five major healthcare industry associations and the Service Employees International Union joined in a pledge to work with President Obama on achieving reform, but ended with a fizzle as reports and criticism of what exactly was committed came to the fore. At issue is the amount of money to be trimmed from annual healthcare costs.

Earlier in the week, President Obama characterized the pledge as a commitment to save as much as \$2 trillion – or 1.5 percentage points off the rate of health spending – each year over 10 years. However, a clarification later in the week by the American Hospital Association noted the promise was to lower the annual rate of growth, over time, by 1.5 percentage points, a far cry from annually.

The discrepancy, which was downplayed by the Administration, highlights the difficulties that lie ahead between general pledges of support and actual implementation of specific policies that require the backing of stakeholders with varying, and often competing, interests. It will be interesting to see how this Administration manages those interests going forward to avoid the same pitfalls that ultimately doomed reform during the Clinton administration.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/15/health/policy/15health.html?_r=1&scp=4&sq=health%20care%20reform%20pledge&st=cse

Blue Dogs Start Barking

Last week, the House Blue Dog Caucus, a group of Democrats representing moderate to conservative districts across the country, sought to be heard in the House debate on health care reform. In a letter to each of the three committee chairmen with jurisdiction over health reform, the Blue Dogs decried their lack of involvement in developing a House health reform proposal. They pointed favorably to the Senate where Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus has worked hard to be inclusive as he develops legislation for Senate consideration.

These Blue Dogs are significant for several reasons. First, they are the Democrats who are most at-risk in the 2010 elections. Many of them represent districts George Bush regularly carried and John McCain carried some of them as well. A House-passed ultra-liberal approach to health reform would make them even more vulnerable next year. And the Democratic leadership in the House does not want to see them go down to defeat either.

Second, and perhaps most important, since Democrats have a huge margin in the House (and therefore the GOP is not a factor there), these moderate Democrats are the swing votes on health reform. They have leverage and, as indicated by their letter, they intend to use it.

All this starts to make things interesting...

<http://thehill.com/leading-the-news/blue-dogs-bare-teeth-on-health-reform-2009-05-12.html>

Other issues in play:

- **NYC Health Commissioner Named to Head CDC** – Last week, Dr. Thomas Frieden was appointed director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the midst of the national Swine Flu epidemic. Frieden, who has been described as a 'hard-nosed health official,' currently serves as the New York City Health Commissioner and previously did a stint at the CDC from 1990-2002. He is credited with cutting teen smoking in half and reducing AIDS deaths by 40 percent in New York City, and with combating the spread of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis nationwide. While in NYC, Frieden made a significant impact on New Yorkers' health by taking a stand (considered to be controversial by some) against smoking and obesity, securing new limits on smoking in restaurants and bars, big increases in cigarette taxes, bans on trans-fats in restaurant foods.

It's unlikely Frieden will have the ability to drive policy changes at a national level in the same way he was able to in NYC. However, anti-obesity organizations and legislators looking for "quick fixes" to promote prevention and wellness as part of healthcare reform know they have a willing and able champion in Frieden down the road. Still, his past

approaches have been criticized for blurring the line between government's responsibility to regulate health and individual responsibility. We'll know more after he starts in June.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/15/AR2009051500295.html>

- **Senate and House Looking at Health Insurance Mandates** – Both the Senate Finance and House Energy and Commerce Committees are deep in discussion over whether to mandate health insurance, and if so, how it would take shape. Considerations include whether to require people to buy health insurance or employers to offer insurance or contribute to the cost of paying for it. Or, will it be a combination of the two?

<http://www.cq.com/display.do?dockey=/cqonline/prod/data/docs/html/news/111/news111-000003118095.html@allnews&metapub=CQ-NEWS&searchIndex=0&seqNum=1&productId=5>

CCC-DC Perspective

By Michal Fishman

At Risk: Protecting Access to Regulated Health Information

Last week, representatives from pharmaceutical, advertising, internet search engine and public relations companies met to discuss developing recommendations regarding FDA's approach to regulating pharmaceutical and medical companies' social media outreach, sponsored links and online communications. What was clear from the discussion is that the current FDA approach of shutting down easy access to regulated health information (sponsorship ads, in particular) isn't working.

In the absence of quick links to regulated health information, patients seeking information about pharmaceutical medicines or disease states are at risk for being directed to sites that don't offer regulated information, leaving patients to determine for themselves what information is legitimate and what isn't. In today's information-rich and short-on-time environment, where people expect to find information at the click of a mouse, not having easy access to information is a liability. That liability only grows when you consider the number of people disseminating information they find to their social networks via Facebook, blogs, My Space, YouTube and more.

Companies can't miss the opportunity to help define this space before it's defined for them and consumers in search of easy access to health information are out of luck.

Healthcare Playmaker Profile

Rep. Michael Burgess, MD, (R-TX-26)



Dr. Burgess, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has advocated for health care legislation aimed at reducing health care costs, improving choices, reforming liability laws to put the needs of patients first, and ensuring there are enough doctors in the public and private sector to care

for America's patients. One of few doctors in the House, he recently founded and serves as chairman of the House Health Care Caucus. The Republican-member caucus is committed to advancing reforms that reduce costs, increase patient control, expand choice and promote cures. According to his bio, during his six years in Congress, Dr. Burgess he has played an important role in bi-partisan efforts to ensure the safety of food, drugs, and consumer products.
<http://burgess.house.gov/>

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