

MMA Executive Committee Reaffirms Position on Health System Reform; Supports Public Option with Qualifications

The MMA Executive Committee met this past week at the home of President Stephanie Lash, M.D. in Orrington and voted to reaffirm the principles set forth in the 2003 White Paper entitled, *Providing Coverage to All, MMA's White Paper on Healthcare Reform in Maine*. The Committee also adopted a statement supporting a "public option" in the current national health care reform debate, so long as any such public plan met the principles expressed in the MMA White Paper.

The adopted statement on the public option reads as follows:

In an effort to provide coverage to all persons, MMA supports a public option in the health insurance market so long as the plan meets the principles of the MMA White Paper on Health System Reform dated May 2003 and re-affirmed July 15, 2009.

Although the White Paper was drafted and its principles adopted more than six years ago, the eight page document is as relevant today in the context of national health system reform as it was when adopted just prior to the enactment by the Maine Legislature of Governor Baldacci's Dirigo Health legislation. It supports the concepts of universal coverage through an individual health insurance mandate, similar to the Massachusetts law which has since been enacted.

The White Paper lays out several strategies for dealing with coverage and access, cost, and quality, but recommends achieving universal access by building upon the existing system of public and private payors. But, the document also states that private health insurance must be reformed in order to lower premiums and to offer products which are both affordable and attractive to individuals and families currently uninsured.

The idea of a government-supported public plan to compete with private health insurance plans has been one of the most difficult issues that the Congress has dealt with in its current work to reform the way health care is currently delivered and paid for in the country. Maine's senior U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe, a member of the Senate Finance Committee drafting one of the proposals to be considered by the full Senate, was the only Republican on the Committee to not sign a letter to the Committee Chair (Max Baucus, D-MT) opposing a public option. But, Senator Snowe has been suggesting a proposal whereby such an option would only be triggered if the private plans were not competitive.

"A public option could be utilized to put some pressure on the private plans, but would need to be structured as to compete fairly," noted Gordon Smith, Esq., MMA EVP following the Executive Committee meeting. "Such a plan would also need to pay providers adequately for their services, in order not to exacerbate the current cost shift."

The MMA White Paper can be viewed in its entirety on the MMA Website at www.mainemed.com. Or, you may call the MMA office at 622-3374, ext. 219 and a copy will be mailed to you.