



Policy Statement

Physicians Must Lead the Way to a High-Value Health System in the United States

June 2012

Background:

The United States spends 17.9 % of our Gross Domestic Product on health care—50% more than any other country in the world spends on health care—yet sees no comparable benefit in health outcomes. Life expectancy in the U.S. lags that in other developed countries, infant mortality rates are higher, and the rates of death from diseases like heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and bacterial infections exceed those in 18 other countries.

Experts estimate that at least 30% of our \$2.6 trillion in health care spending is due to waste. Much of this is due to unnecessary and avoidable care. Financial conflicts of interest and greed drive some of the unnecessary care, while inefficiencies, defensive medicine, and a culture of medicine in which many believe that “more is better” account for much of the rest. Not taking into account what patients really want also contributes to excessive and unnecessary care.

Eliminating waste from our health care system will not only give us more for our health care investment, but will also free up private and public dollars for other important social benefits like public health, education, nutrition, housing, recreation, and a safer environment, all of which can improve the nation's health. Creating a high-value health care system where we get the most for every dollar we spend will eliminate the need to ever have to ration health care in the future.

Physicians are the key to improving value, reducing waste

Physicians order the tests and procedures, make the referrals, write the prescriptions, and admit patients to the hospital. Factors that contribute to unnecessary care for both patients and providers include:

- A fee-for-service system that rewards volume over quality
- Lack of information about what other health providers have done or are doing for the patient
- Lack of awareness of the costs of medical tests, procedures, and hospital stays at the time when decisions to incur those costs are being made
- A fear of uncertainty and not knowing
- A need to "do something"
- Not exploring what the patient really wants and failing to encourage shared decision-making
- Marketing pressures by pharmaceutical and medical device companies

Physicians can and must provide leadership in acknowledging and addressing these issues. The National Physicians Alliance commits itself to achieving a high-value health system in the United States through the following measures:

- Promoting the NPA Good Stewardship project among all its members, to emphasize the professional responsibility of physicians to act as good stewards of finite clinical resources
- Advocating for new systems of financing and organizing medical care that align incentives with high-value health care
- Teaching the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for high-value health care
- Emphasizing the importance of shared decision-making with patients
- Eliminating sources of conflict of interest
- Reducing the influence of pharmaceutical and medical device marketing on physicians' clinical decision-making
- Encouraging collaborative practice with other health professionals
- Urging adoption of uniform standards in health information technology to enable widespread sharing of data among providers
- Reforming the medical malpractice system to a no-fault or similar system that will improve patient safety while reducing defensive medicine
- Supporting innovative models of health care delivery that improve health outcomes while reducing costs, as well as the research needed to document effectiveness
- Supporting comparative effectiveness research
- Informing physicians about the best evidence and how to "Choose Wisely" when making clinical decisions in collaboration with their patients
- Supporting regulations that limit capital expenditures to avoid overbuilding and excessive technology deployment
- Advocating for measures that improve public health and prevent illnesses in our own communities and across the nation

The NPA is a non-partisan, 501c3 organization, founded in 2005. We represent physicians across specialties who, simply put, want to put health back at the center of health care. We refuse all funding from pharmaceutical and medical device companies. Our core program aims include: 1) affordable, quality health care for all; 2) reducing the influence of pharmaceutical and medical device marketing on medical education and clinical decision making; 3) promoting the civic engagement of physicians with their communities.

To learn more about NPA please visit www.npalliance.org