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## Health Care Notes

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### **Interdisciplinary Student Fellowship Program Started by State Government and The University of Tennessee**

A unique fellowship for law, medicine and pharmacy students across the state of Tennessee has been implemented as a collaboration between The University of Tennessee and the State of Tennessee. The program provides opportunities for senior students in all three disciplines to spend one or two months working together in a branch of state government that is involved in health policy and regulation.

Agencies sponsoring students include the Departments of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (serving as the lead agency), Children's Services, and Correction; the Health Related Boards; the Office of the Attorney General; and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. Students will focus on issues such as licensure and nonprofessional activity, malpractice, narcotics abuse, anti-trust activities, civil rights, TennCare fraud investigations, and child custody and abuse. They will be assigned to an agency staff member involved in these activities in groups of three, one from each health profession, to provide an interdisciplinary experience. As a state program, students from all law, medical and pharmacy schools in the state will be able to participate. The program will be coordinated through The Center for Health Services Research.

The program was developed by Pamela S. Reed, JD, currently Assistant Director of The Center; Judy Regan, MD, Medical Director of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation; and Todd Bess, PharmD, a member of the faculty of The University of Tennessee College of Pharmacy. For more information about the program, please contact Ms. Reed at (615) 532-6772 or The Center at (901) 448-5826.

### **Poll Demonstrates Support for TennCare**

Tennesseans support continuing TennCare coverage for all who are currently enrolled in the program. This was the main finding of a state-wide poll of voters conducted from March 16 through 18, 2000 by *The Tennessean* of Nashville. Voters were asked (1) whether they support or oppose full funding for TennCare to continue coverage for all those currently enrolled; and (2) whether they support or oppose reducing coverage to help balance the state budget. TennCare, as of March 25, 2000, covered 793,044 Medicaid eligibles as well as 519,802 Tennesseans who were previously uninsured or uninsurable because of pre-existing medical conditions.

Results showed that 65% of voters supported full funding to continue current coverage, while 21% were opposed and 14% were undecided. Only 23% supported reducing coverage to balance the state budget; 59% were opposed to reducing coverage and 18% were undecided.

*“The underlying message is quite clear, however: Multifaceted state tobacco control programs are effective in reducing tobacco use.”*

## State Programs Shown Effective in Reducing Tobacco Use

Actions by state governments are effective in reducing tobacco use according to a recent report by the Institute of Medicine. States with rigorous education and control policies such as California, Florida and Massachusetts have greater reduction in tobacco use than do other states. Florida, for example, reported a 54% decline in the number of middle school students who smoked and a 24% drop in the number of high school students who smoked after a two-year period of vigorous educational campaigning. As noted in the report, “The stakes are high....The estimated 430,000 deaths attributed to tobacco use annually are far more than those caused by illegal drugs, accidents, suicides, AIDS, motor vehicle accidents and alcohol combined.”

Specific state-level actions proven to be successful include:

- counteradvertising and public education programs, especially those focusing on abuses of the tobacco industry;
- establishing smoke-free workplaces and public spaces, leading to a reduction in the number of smokers by 20% and a reduction in use by continuing smokers by 10%;
- increasing tobacco taxes, with an expected reduction in consumption by 4% (8% in children) for every 10% increase in price;
- supporting treatment programs, including providing information about treatment options and ensuring that insurance programs cover costs of treatment; and
- enforcing youth access restrictions.

These findings are particularly important after the recent Supreme Court decision that the Food and Drug Administration did not have regulatory authority over tobacco products. That decision turned regulatory oversight back to state and federal legislation.

The full text of the report, which contains references to specific programs, may be found on the National Academy Press web site ([www.nap.edu](http://www.nap.edu)). A comparison of activities in Tennessee and other states will be distributed as an upcoming Research Brief publication from The Center.

## Education and Health Top Voters Concerns for 2000 Elections

A Kaiser Family Foundation survey demonstrated that education and health issues were the top two concerns of prospective voters for the fall, 2000 elections. A population sample was asked to identify the two most important issues in deciding their vote; 29% identified education and 28% reported health care. The economy and social security followed, with 19% and 17% of respondents choosing them, respectively.

The most important health issues are displayed in Figure 1. Although expanding insurance coverage was the most common concern, willingness to make a financial commitment to expand coverage was limited. For example, 48% favored only a limited effort to provide insurance for some of the uninsured that would not require a tax increase; 28% favored a major effort to provide universal coverage with a tax increase, and 12% favored no change in the current situation. In addition, 24% were not willing to pay any additional premiums or taxes to expand

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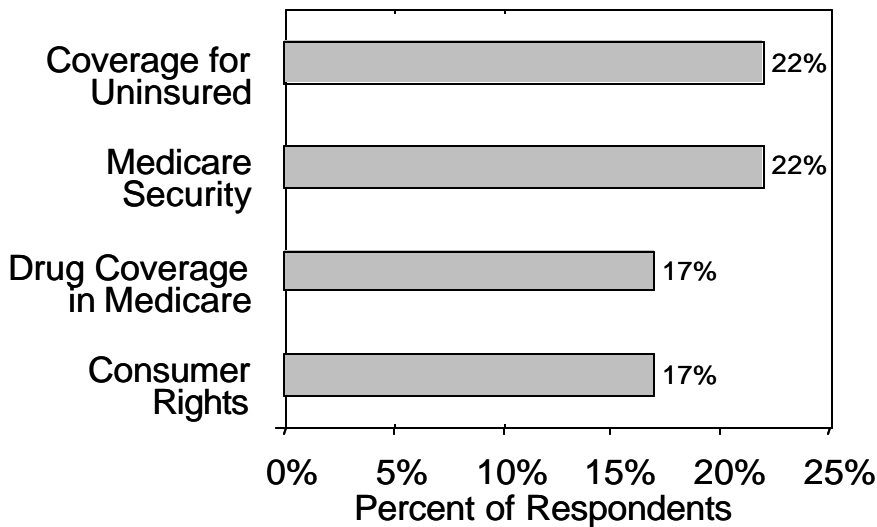


Figure 1: The most important health care issues deciding the vote of respondents to a Kaiser Foundation survey. Coverage for the uninsured and security for the Medicare program were the two most commonly identified priorities.

coverage and 20% were willing to pay only \$5 per month.

Details of the survey and complete results are available from the Kaiser Family Foundation ([www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)).

### National Survey Emphasizes Public Concerns About Managed Care Plans

Most Americans believe that significant problems exist with managed care and that these problems are not getting better. Principle results of surveys conducted from April, 1999 to February, 2000 by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health included the following:

- 61% of respondents felt that managed care has decreased the amount of time doctors spend with patients, 63% felt that managed care made it more difficult to see a specialist and 50% indicated that managed care reduced the quality of care, while only 45% felt that managed care reduced the costs of health care;
- 58% of responders were worried that if they became sick, their health plan would be more concerned about saving money than providing the best treatment, including 63% of those in managed care plans and 48% in fee-for-service programs (Figure 2);

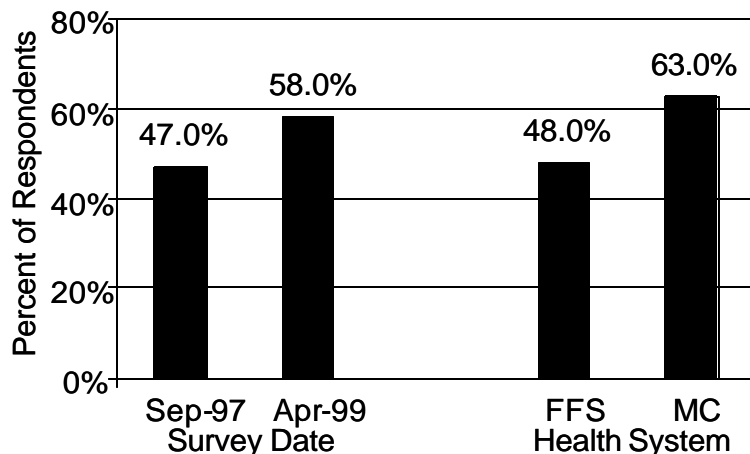


Figure 2: Percent of responders to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll indicating they were worried that if they become sick their healthplan would be more worried about saving money than providing the best treatments. Left: Responses increased from September 1997 and April 1999. Right: Percentages were greater among members of managed care (MC) than fee-for-service (FFS) plans.

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JD, FAAN

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□ only 15% responded that managed care organizations have improved over the past several years whereas 40% concluded that their performance has declined; and

□ 80% of responders favored consumer protection legislation, including direct access to specialists (77%), payment for emergency room visits patients believe are needed (76%), the right to appeal denied claims to an independent reviewer (83%) and the right to sue a health plan for malpractice (76%).

Complete information about these surveys can be obtained from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).

## Faculty and Staff Appointed to The Center for Health Services Research

Virginia Trotter Betts, RN, MSN, JD, FAAN, joined The Center as Associate Director for Health Policy Initiatives and the faculty of the College of Nursing as Professor of Nursing. Prior to this, she served as Senior Advisor on Nursing and Policy to the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services. In the Office of Public Health and Science, Ms. Betts was actively engaged in the Surgeon General's initiatives on mental health including "Mental Health: a Report of the Surgeon General" and she was awarded the Surgeon General's Medallion, the most prestigious award given by the Surgeon General. She has also served as President of The American Nursing Association and was one of twelve nurses to receive a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship.

Pamela S. Reed, JD, has been appointed Assistant Director for Program Development. She received her law degree from the University of Tennessee and has served as Director of the Office of Education, Tennessee Department of Health. Ms. Reed will be based in Nashville and Knoxville, serving as a coordinator of the interdisciplinary health policy fellowship (described on page 1) and as liaison to university and governmental departments and agencies in Nashville and Knoxville.

The Center's offices are located in the Doctor Office Building, 66 North Pauline Street, Suite 463, on the University of Tennessee Health Science Center campus. The facilities and services of The Center are open to all Associates to facilitate research, education and public service in areas of health care policy and delivery studies.

### "ASK US!" Feature of Web Site Now Active

A new feature has been activated on The Center's web site to enable users to ask specific health-related questions to the staff and Associates of The Center for Health Services Research. Clicking on the "ASK US!" button from The Center's home page ([www.utmem.edu/center](http://www.utmem.edu/center)) will open a dialogue box for entering your question. A response will be provided by e-mail, usually within 48 hours.

## Health Care Quote

*"When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot become manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied."*

*-Herophilus of Chalcedon, 335-280 BC  
Physician to Alexander the Great*