

OPINION

The Patriot Ledger
February 01, 2005

READER'S VIEW: State health care laws need reform

By SANDY EATON, RN, Quincy

Thank you for laying out the options currently before the Massachusetts Legislature and the citizens of the commonwealth regarding health care reform. Unfortunately, by viewing this issue as primarily a problem for those currently without insurance, you miss the big picture and the solution.

Nearly 39 cents of every health care dollar spent in Massachusetts goes to overhead, not to delivery of care. This was detailed in a report commissioned by the legislature and published in December 2002. Every increment in care which carves out a segment of the population for coverage adds to the bureaucratic overhead. Every hospital or clinic that competes for market share with the hospital or clinic down the street through glossy ads or redundant high-tech equipment shunts resources away from patient care.

Big pharmaceutical's PR and lobbying expenses far exceed its research and development investment, and drive health care institutions to skimp on professional and support staff while working overtime to thwart enactment of serious patient safety regulations. No other industrialized country tolerates this behavior.

The elections are over, but the heightened interest in health care legislation on Beacon Hill is driven by the broad support expressed to amend the Massachusetts constitution to make health care a right of all who live here, like education. When passed by the voters in 2006, something will have to be done.

Either employers will have to choose between providing access to insurance for their employees or paying into a state fund for the uninsured, or a universal, single-payer, seamless, tax-supported insurance plan will be adopted.

Employers, employees, the retired, the disabled, children, all of us, will be able to enjoy a single standard of medical and mental health services. While the transition from our current mishmash to this better system has administrative challenges to be met, the greatest challenge is that of political will.