

Health Care Coverage Must Include High Quality Primary Care

The Missouri Academy of Family Physicians (MAFP) is an organization of 1500 family physicians dedicated to providing primary care for Missourians of all ages. Primary care is first-contact, comprehensive, coordinated care delivered over a patient's entire lifetime. Family physicians specialize in the management of acute and chronic illnesses and, whenever possible, in the prevention of illness.

The MAFP supports evidence-based, patient-centered primary care delivered in a "medical home" to ensure that all patients receive the care they need in a timely, coordinated, comprehensive, and cost-effective manner.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Osteopathic Association, and the American Medical Association all support the concept of the patient centered medical home, which should have these characteristics: a personal physician; physician-directed medical team, which may include nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, and other allied health professionals; whole-person orientation; coordinated care; quality and safety; and enhanced access. (1)(2)

Adequate payment for the work done outside of clinic visits, such as communicating with patients, coordinating care, managing medications, giving phone or e-mail advice to patients, education, etc., is an important and necessary component of any effective medical home.

Research has shown that states with a higher ratio of primary care physicians to specialists have lower rates of heart disease, stroke, cancer, low birth weight infants, and infant mortality. Citizens in these states are generally healthier and live longer. Additionally, these improved outcomes are achieved at substantially lower costs. (3)(4)(5)

When patients have access to a medical home, costly emergency room visits are reduced and illnesses are detected and treated earlier, leading to healthier patients and fewer hospitalizations.

Using the medical home approach, Community Care of North Carolina, a Medicaid care management program, has improved health outcomes, achieved significant cost savings, and increased access to care for almost 700,000 Medicaid beneficiaries. In 2004 alone, the program is estimated to have saved the state between \$230 million and \$260 million. (6)

Missourians deserve to receive the full spectrum of primary care so that they can remain as healthy as possible. This care needs to be easily accessible, of the highest quality, and affordable. The patient centered medical home offers this promise.

References

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3. Shi, *Journal of Health Services*, 1994:24,431-458
4. Vogel et al, *International Journal of Health*, 1998: 28: 183-196
5. The Relationship Between Primary Care, Income Inequality, and Mortality in US States, 1980-1995, Starfield, Barbara, *JABFP*, Vol 16 (5), pgs 412-22
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