

**National Healthcare Reform**  
**September 7, 2009**

To the Editor:

In all the shouting and gnashing of teeth about national healthcare reform, a critical element of patient care is being lost in the din – patient direct access to specialty care. It is obvious to most lawmakers and patients that women should have direct access to their OB-Gyns - specially trained physicians experienced in serving women's unique healthcare issues.

It is less clear to governmental and insurance company officials, however, that patients with fractures, sports injuries or other musculoskeletal ailments should have direct access to high quality orthopaedic care. Orthopaedic surgeons are the only physicians specifically trained and experienced in treating the entire range of soft tissue and bone conditions.

Primary care physicians are vital in the healthcare continuum for a whole host of common medical issues. But primary care for musculoskeletal issues are best diagnosed and treated by orthopaedic surgeons. When one considers that most medical schools no longer require an orthopaedic rotation for medical residents, it becomes evident that orthopaedic primary care is best delivered by orthopaedic surgeons.

Unfortunately, the various proposals emanating from Congress do not guarantee patients direct access to specialty care. In fact, there appears to be no guarantee that patients will even be able to choose their own physicians. That's why the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society has decided to oppose HR 3200 in its current iteration. Patient direct access to specialty care and the right to choose your own physician are necessary components of any state or national healthcare reform effort. And to ensure the highest quality care possible, physicians should not be prohibited from owning or operating surgical centers or imaging services – facilities that patients constantly report are more convenient and provide more satisfaction than hospital-based ancillary services.

In our current market-driven healthcare payment system, we understand that healthcare insurance equals access to healthcare services. Therefore, affordable healthcare coverage for all Pennsylvanians has long been a guiding principle of the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society. We also believe that the insurance market reform is necessary to ensure patients do not lose their insurance because of pre-existing conditions or lifetime caps. Finally, we believe that medical liability reform is the surest method to bring immediate cost savings to the healthcare delivery system and is necessary at the state and national level.

As the national healthcare reform debate continues, the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society is committed to working with Pennsylvania's Congressional Delegation to ensure that our principles are part of the final legislative product. We invite you to visit our website to review those principles at [www.paorthosoc.org/healthcarereform/](http://www.paorthosoc.org/healthcarereform/).

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