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POS Calls for Resolution to Healthcare Predicament

HARRISBURG (September 16, 2008) –Physician leaders of the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society today called on policymakers to negotiate an agreement which will preserve the state’s MCARE abatement program, retire the MCARE fund, and provide health insurance to Pennsylvania’s uninsured. “Our Society is gratified that the healthcare community today is presenting a united front to the General Assembly on these vital issues” said POS President Dr. Jon Tucker, standing with fellow members of organized medicine from the statewide medical and hospital associations. “Since November of 2007, our organization has clearly and consistently advocated for a ten year extension of the Mcare Abatement Program, a ten year phase-out of Mcare coverage, and retirement of the Mcare Fund through use of the Health Care Provider Retention fund. We have also supported providing healthcare insurance to the uninsured”.

Dr. Tucker, a practicing orthopaedic surgeon from Allegheny County, expressed appreciation to Governor Rendell and the General Assembly for maintaining healthcare reform as a priority issue throughout the remaining days of the legislative session. He urged all parties to work together, just as the healthcare community is working together, to find common ground upon which all can agree. “You have all heard the familiar Southwest Airlines slogan, ‘You are now free to move about the country’™. This popular tagline may soon apply to physicians in Pennsylvania if the General Assembly does not pass some type of meaningful healthcare reform legislation during the remaining session days in September and October.” said Tucker.

Many believe this is a Herculean task, but the parameters for an agreement are plain to see. Physicians need continued assistance with liability insurance costs; patients need access to high quality healthcare services. Dividing the financial pie is the problem, but

failure to reach a resolution is not an option. This united healthcare community stands ready to work with the four legislative caucuses and Governor Rendell to forge a solution.

The Mcare Abatement Program has protected our healthcare system from the devastating effects of the medical liability crisis. Enacted in 2003, the program has helped thousands of doctors to continue to treat their patients. In return for the state's assistance with medical liability costs, physicians agree to practice for one additional year in Pennsylvania. Without Mcare Abatement, there is a real possibility that doctors may consider leaving the Commonwealth to go to states with lower medical liability costs and higher reimbursements.

In addition, under current law the Mcare Fund is scheduled to be closed to new claims by January of 2013. To accomplish this, the primary level of medical liability insurance is scheduled to increase by \$250,000 in 2010 and another \$250,000 in 2013. Each \$250,000 will result in at least a 25% increase in physician medical liability insurance costs.

Also under current law, the Mcare Fund's multi-billion dollar unfunded liability will be retired by continued assessments on doctors well beyond 2013. This scenario will have a drastic, negative impact on high-risk specialty practices across the Commonwealth.

“We implore the General Assembly to pass legislation to renew the Mcare Abatement Program for ten years, to phase out Mcare coverage over a ten year period, and to retire the Mcare Fund using the existing state revenues. We ask the Rendell administration and the General Assembly to work together to resolve their differences and enact a sustainable program to provide healthcare insurance to the uninsured.”

POS is a professional medical specialty organization representing more than 900 orthopaedic surgeons across Pennsylvania in advocating for excellence in the practice of orthopaedic medicine. For more information, visit the POS website at www.paorthosociety.org.

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