



OP-EDS

E-Prescribing: a common-sense prescription for improving healthcare for all Americans

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The United States's healthcare system often seems like a paradox — our nation leads the world in technological innovation, and we invest more money per capita in healthcare than any other country.

Despite this, our healthcare delivery system remains inefficient and expensive, and is lagging in its ability to provide quality, safe healthcare for all.

Last week, the three of us banded together to launch the New Democrat Health Care Task Force, with the goal of pressing for common-sense proposals that will bring about widespread improvements to healthcare in America.

Our reform-minded coalition of centrist Democrats is striving to dramatically improve Americans' access to quality, affordable health insurance through prevention, innovation and competition.

The three of us bring over 60 years of healthcare policy experience to the Health Care Task Force and represent all three major committees charged with shepherding healthcare policy through the House.

In an arena that has seen much debate and too little progress, we are hopeful that by centering our agenda on proposals that enjoy wide, bipartisan support, we can enact legislation now that will tangibly improve our nation's healthcare system.

Our top priority this year is passing the E-MEDS Act of 2007, which will encourage the use of electronic prescribing, or e-prescribing, to eliminate the medical errors, injuries, hospitalizations and 7,000 deaths that can result annually from illegible prescriptions and bad drug interactions.

The need for e-prescribing is clear. According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), more than 1.5 million preventable adverse drug events (ADEs) occur every year in the United States. Studies indicate that at least 530,000 preventable ADEs occur each year among the Medicare population, and cost the federal government upwards of \$887 million (\$1,983 per person).

While e-prescribing enjoys broad-based support in the medical community, fewer than 1 in 10 physicians use it in their offices, due to the expense of initially acquiring and implanting e-prescribing technology.

Our bipartisan, bicameral bill — which was introduced in the Senate by Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.), John Ensign (R-Nev.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) — will help physicians transition to using e-prescribing in Medicare by providing a one-time payment bonus to physicians for the initial cost of purchasing e-prescribing technology.

The bill also provides an extra 1 percent bonus for the administrative costs attached to every Medicare prescription a doctor writes electronically. In order to ensure widespread adoption of e-prescribing, the bill also establishes financial penalties for Medicare physicians who do not begin using e-prescribing by 2011.

Going forward, we also must ensure that sensitive patient information is privacy-protected.

While our number-one goal this year is passing the EMEDS Act, the New Democrat Health Care Task Force's vision extends far beyond. Going forward, we hope to continue promoting innovation by adopting an

interoperable Health IT system to ensure information sharing across multiple providers and embracing comparative effectiveness research for new and existing medical procedures, drugs and devices.

We also want to help people lead healthier lives by improving and expanding community based prevention through school- and workplace-based efforts and launching public-private partnerships to change behaviors that lead to chronic disease.

The New Democrats Health Care Task Force also seeks to encourage competition that will empower consumers to hold healthcare providers accountable for both cost and quality of care by promoting value-based purchasing and evidence-based benefits.

We will also take steps to ensure doctors are encouraged to use the most therapeutically effective, and cost-efficient, medications first by rewarding use of clinically based protocols from physician peers.

America's healthcare system will not be perfected over night. Large challenges and widespread disagreements remain on how best to reform our nation's healthcare system to better meet Americans' needs.

As we wade through the larger debate on healthcare in America, though, it is imperative that we take advantage of the broad bipartisan support that now exists to press through initiatives like e-prescribing that can dramatically improve our healthcare system. By ensuring doctors' prescriptions are not lost in translation, the EMEDS Act will save time, paperwork, and, most importantly, Americans' lives.

Altmire is a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, Capps is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Schwartz is a member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

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