

NEWS RELEASE

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HHS SECRETARY LEAVITT DISCUSSES HEALTH CARE WITH PHYSICIAN LEADERS

Minneapolis – U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Levitt met today with physician leaders of the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) to build support for federal priorities regarding health care cost and quality.

President Bush in August signed an executive order directing federal agencies that administer or support government health insurance programs such as Medicare and Medicaid to promote quality and efficiency through health information technology and by giving consumers more information about cost and quality. Leavitt is meeting with physicians around the nation to build support for the Administration's goals.

Secretary Leavitt outlined a vision for the future that included key aspects of the MMA's health care reform proposal, Physicians Plan for a Healthy Minnesota. Leavitt hopes to achieve a system that will 1) electronically connect the health care system, 2) measure quality, 3) measure cost and provide information in a way the public can understand and 4) create incentives for people to seek high quality, low cost care.

MMA President G. Richard Geier, M.D., assured Leavitt that the MMA was committed to championing quality health care in Minnesota. “Sec. Leavitt’s goals for quality improvement and system redesign are remarkably similar to those of MMA physicians with our emphasis on improving quality, and emphasizing value,” Geier said. “The question is how to reach our mutual goals in the face of our various constraints and practical realities without making each others problems worse. Meetings like this help us understand each other’s situations better.”

“We are also encouraged that Secretary Leavitt recognizes the problems created by the flawed Medicare payment system that lead to cost shifting, and the difficulty some physicians have had in moving to an electronic medical record,” Geier said.

Secretary Leavitt told the group that the Medicare pay formula should be based in part on the quality of care physicians deliver and that the Administration plans to encourage electronic systems by certifying which will be interoperable.

He commended the MMA for its efforts to champion quality measures and continuous quality. “The whole world has a great deal to learn from what you are doing,” he told the group.

MMA CEO Robert Meiches, M.D., said it was important to give patients useful information about cost and quality but patients, rather than health plans or insurance companies, should make the decisions about their health care.

MMA physicians participating in the meeting included Michael Ainslie, M.D., chair of the MMA Board of Trustees; James J. Dehen, M.D., MMA president-elect; Peter Dehnel, M.D.; G. Richard Geier, M.D., MMA president; Dionne Hart, M.D.; Kurt Hopper, M.D.; John Larsen, M.D., speaker of the MMA House of Delegates; Teresa McCarthy, M.D.; Robert Meiches, M.D., MMA CEO; George Schoephoerster, M.D.; and Margaret Spartz, M.D..