

Posted on Tue, Jul. 04, 2006

HEALTH NOTES

Survey indicates health worries

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Columnist

Concerns about the cost of health care and the plight of the uninsured came through loud and clear on a survey released last week by the **Kansas Hospital Association**.

"What it tells us is that the general public is beginning to understand that when the number of uninsured Kansans grows, it has an effect on their health insurance premiums," Tom Bell, president of the association, said in an interview.

The telephone survey was administered in February to a random sample of 300 Kansas residents and had an error margin of plus or minus 5.9 percentage points.

Nearly three out of four respondents expressed concern over the cost of health care. They blamed lawsuits, insurance industry practices and the cost of prescription drugs.

Fifty-eight percent of residents cited the number of uninsured Kansans — more than 300,000 — as a major problem.

The survey results also indicated that one out of three Kansans thinks the government should offer an insurance program like **Medicare** to all Americans. When asked how such a program should be paid for, a majority suggested cutting other government programs.

One who was impressed by the concern expressed for the uninsured was physician Sharon Lee, medical director of **Southwest Boulevard Family Health Care** in Kansas City, Kan. Services at the clinic, at 340 Southwest Blvd., include obstetrics, pediatrics care, adult medicine, geriatric care, minor surgery and minor emergency care.

Lee said more than 40 percent of the clinic's patients are uninsured.

"We're always seeing an increase," Lee said. "For at least the last eight years, the number of people who don't have any insurance, or who have only minimal coverage, has increased every year."

She said the same problem permeates clinics for the medically indigent throughout Wyandotte County.

"The umbrella is not stretching as far," said Lee, who also chairs the **Wyandotte County Safety Net Clinics Coalition**. "The umbrella has shrunk. People that used to be covered for certain things are not covered or are very poorly covered."

What do you think?

The public has until Sept. 1 to comment on interim recommendations released last month by the **Citizens' Health Care Working Group**. The group was created by the **Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003** to engage in a national public debate about what health care coverage Americans want and how they'd be willing to pay for it.

The group met with experts, conducted Internet polls and held town hall forums around the country to form its recommendations. Among them are that all Americans should have affordable health care and that the federal government should promote efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of care while controlling costs. The complete set of recommendations can be viewed at www.citizenshealthcare.gov/recommendations/interim_recommendations.php.

Those who wish to comment may do so by going to www.citizenshealthcare.gov, by e-mailing citizenshealth@ahrq.gov, or by writing to Citizens' Health Care Working Group, Attn.: Interim Recommendations, 7201 Wisconsin Ave., Room 575, Bethesda, MD 20814.

After public comments are received, the group will submit final recommendations to Congress and the president.

