

## Group urges better health, treatment

By Jim Killackey

Oklahomans were urged Tuesday to take personal responsibility for a healthier lifestyle but also insist on the best possible medical care when they do get sick.

During an Oklahoma City public hearing of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group, state Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland said Oklahoma continues to have too many smokers, too many diabetics, too many teen pregnancies, too many overweight and obese residents, and too many people dying from heart disease and cancer.

### ►Citizens' Health Care Working Group

More than 700,000 Oklahomans don't have any health insurance, and far too much of Oklahoma medical care is given at expensive hospital emergency rooms, Holland said.

"You can become a healthy individual if you're willing to make changes," said Mike Dollins of Oklahoma City. Dollins was one of 500 participants Tuesday in the forum on how to improve an ailing U.S. health care system.

### Medical forum comes to city

Oklahoma City was selected as one of the final three destinations for a medical forum started in 2003 that already has involved more than 35 community meetings nationwide.

"The system is in crisis. Americans want us to do something and do it now," said Catherine G. McLaughlin, a member of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group.

In preliminary findings, the group noted that "American health care sadly underachieves" despite expenditures of more than \$2 trillion a year.

"The health care system gets Americans the right care ... about 50 percent of the time," the group said.

About 98,000 Americans die every year because of medical errors, the group said.

"While no system can ever eliminate all errors, we can do better. Too many Americans are being let down by their health care institutions. Many people are afraid of the health care system. They are bewildered by its complexity and are suspicious about who it aims to serve," according to the group's findings.

During Tuesday's hearing, participants were polled on this question: Should all Americans have access to affordable health care coverage?

The results: 45 percent "yes"; 41 percent "no;" and 14 percent "unsure."

The Citizens' Health Care Working Group has made six recommendations for review. One proposal states that: "It should be public policy that all Americans have affordable health care."

Several forum participants said any national health care system operated by the federal government would be disastrous.

### **Patients challenged to get involved**

Holland challenged patients to be more involved in their own health care because unnecessary and expensive "defensive medicine" is practiced daily by doctors.

Such practices drive up the cost of medical care, she said.

"Patients have a personal responsibility to engage in conversations with their physician. They must understand the choices involved in their treatment, and be in agreement with their doctor.

"They shouldn't blindly go along with every decision. They need to ask questions," she said.

A final report from the Citizens' Health Care Working Group will go later this year to Congress and the president.