

2nd Annual Prostate Cancer Forum An Educational Initiative for

Health Initiatives in the Era of Healthcare Reform: Paying for the Care You Will Need

Mr. Virgil Simons

I. United States Healthcare System

The United States spends one-seventh of our gross domestic product on healthcare, which is more than the next five countries combined. We spend more than \$650 billion on cancer care alone, more than all of the other countries combined. Are we getting great healthcare? I would posit that we don't. We have the worst infant mortality of any industrialized nation, and we are still the only nation without universal healthcare. In addition, we still have a problem in terms of access to care for the majority of our people. Despite the fact that we are spending more money and it is costing us more money, we are getting less care.

II. National Healthcare Quality Report - 2007

The AHRQ has said that our, "Preventive healthcare lags significantly behind other gains in healthcare." What that means is that we spend more money treating illness than we do preventing illness. Our system compensates doctors for treating you but not for making you healthy and keeping you well. We have a system that is willing to spend \$93,000 on a new protocol that's been proven to give an additional four months of life to only 25% of the population. Perhaps that \$93,000 would better be spent up front on early identification of disease and education against disease rather than trying to deliver marginal benefit at the end-stage of life. There are new treatment protocols like proton beam radiation and robotic surgery that have limited benefit in terms of improving quality of life and survival, but they generate a lot of money for the healthcare establishment. That is fine, but we have to be able to rationalize how we spend the money to ensure that all of the people in our nation have that ability. Access to care and information varies widely based on race and socioeconomic status. We have one of the most communicative nations in the world, and there shouldn't be groups that don't have access to the care and information that they need.

III. American Cancer Society Disparity Study - 2007

Cancer patients with private insurance are much more likely to be diagnosed early and increase their long-term survival. Whereas those who are uninsured or who have government insurance are likely to be diagnosed with advanced-stage disease at their first treatment. Inequities and inequalities are breaking down the social structure.

IV. The "Iron Triangle"

The "Iron Triangle" is a combination of community and patient interest groups who are talking about their legitimate interests in terms of the constituencies that they represent and who are working with government enabling agencies and ultimately Congress to come together to create a program of strength that works for the society as a whole. We have to find a way to make government care. If we sit idly by and just bemoan the situation, things will continue as they are. We have to be about making change happen.

V. The Mandate

Rudolf Virchow said, "Health is an indirect measure of a society's collective democracy." If we do not have equality of health, we do not have a truly democratic society. All of us have to be a part of making that happen.

Prostate Cancer Advocacy

Ms. Carol Christner-KCI, Director, Government Relations

I. What is Advocacy?

Patients and caregivers probably have the greatest power to make a difference in the outcome of prostate cancer, and one way to do that is through advocacy. Advocacy is the action of supporting something that you care very deeply about. It can be political, which is advocating for a specific piece of legislation, and it can be social and intellectual, as in speaking out on behalf of those who don't have a voice for themselves at the current point in time.

II. How to Advocate

When you are beginning an advocacy campaign, you need to do a few things in advance. You need to define the problem, and in focusing on Congressional action for prostate cancer, we know that there is a problem with the incidence and survivor rates being significantly higher among African American men than any other race or ethnic group. You also need to find an answer. We need funding for research, education, awareness, outreach and early detection. Finally, you have to identify a target. For instance, House Resolution 313 has been introduced by Congressman Gregory Meeks from New York, and it increases funding specifically for addressing the issues of higher incidence and lower survivor rates among African American men.

III. Communicate Your Message

If there is a Bill, whether it is HR 313 or another one that you care passionately about, and you want to go in and talk to your representative about it, you need to know your facts. Know what the numbers are in relation to prostate cancer incidence and survivability. Find out how much money is currently allocated for funding for prostate cancer, and you need to know how that compares to other cancers.

Review your legislator's voting record on similar issues, and know how your issue affects your legislator's constituency. Lastly, every issue has two sides. Be prepared to respond to the opposing viewpoint.

IV. How a Bill Becomes a Law

It helps to know some of the basics about how a bill becomes a law. For instance Congressman Meeks introduced HR Bill 313 to the United States Congress. The bill was then submitted to a committee in Congress, the Energy and Commerce Committee. From that committee, it was filtered down to the Health Sub-Committee. Now, it is sitting somewhere in a committee room awaiting action. If the sub-committee decides that they want to take action on it, they vote on it and they send it to the full committee. There has to be a hearing and another vote. Then it goes to the House floor where it may get a vote. If it does receive a successful vote, it goes to the Senate and repeats the entire process. Under our current Congress, however, only 19 bills have been signed into law out of thousands that have been introduced. The stronger the voice of the advocates behind a bill, the more likely they are to pass. If it's not in this session of Congress, you keep going until there is some funding and you want to make sure that your case has been built to get the needed funding.

Virgil Simons

I would encourage you all to find out who the health liaison individual is in your Representative's or Senator's office, and make that person your new best friend. Keep them apprised of events happening in their district particularly when you would like them to come and be a part of what your community is all about. Particularly in an election year they will have a greater propensity to show up.