

Submitted by Cedar Ridge Health & Rehab Center

The proposed Health Care Reform could have dramatic affect on local Skilled Nursing Facilities. Lebanon is the home of both Cedar Ridge Health and Rehab Center as well as Lebanon Care Center.

"The nursing home industry will be hit especially hard if this legislation goes through," said Mike Altobella, Executive Director of Cedar Ridge Health and Rehab Center. "Jobs will be lost, wages will be cut, and services will be cut. These proposed cuts will result in the loss of 50,000 jobs according to the American Health Care Association."

The debate over health care reform in this country makes clear that most Americans believe something should be done to improve the quality and lower cost of care for all Americans. Just what should be done and how comprehensive this reform should be is the flashpoint of debate. Yet we can all agree the cost of whatever action is taken should not be borne disproportionately by one group. In its current form, the *Affordable Health Choices Act* (H.R. 3200), flagrantly abandons this principle of fairness by proposing continued massive cuts in care for some of America's most vulnerable citizens, its seniors.

Earlier this year, the Obama Administration imposed \$12 billion in cuts to Medicare funding for nursing homes. Now H.R. 3200 cuts an additional \$32 billion in Medicare funding for the care of the frail elderly in skilled nursing homes. These cuts combined represent 9.5% of our total Medicare funding. Other health care sectors are facing far less in terms of cuts: The pharmaceutical industry faces a 5% cut, while hospitals are on the hook for a 6.6% cut in Medicare funding. (Though it should be noted that the increased number of insured persons as a result of the plan would mean hospitals may see an increase in revenue).

The impact of these cuts on the 3.2 million seniors living in skilled nursing facilities would be devastating. According to the American Health Care Association (AHCA), a staggering 80% of patients in nursing homes rely on Medicare or Medicaid to pay for the care they receive. Medicaid is already woefully underfunded. (Many states are already freezing or rolling back Medicaid reimbursement rates.)

The nation's nursing home industry supports health care reform. We have asked Congress repeatedly to take action on behalf of long term care recipients, including implementing a voluntary, federal long term care benefit; an increased role in private financing for long term and post-acute care; and a complete revamp of the Medicare post-acute payment system.

We respectfully and earnestly request that Congress reconsider the massive and disproportionate cuts to nursing homes contained in the House bill. We urge people that care for the future of our elderly to contact their representatives and fervently ask they vote "No" on the bill in its current form. And we plead with Congress not to make something as critical as health care of our seniors and all Americans subject to an artificial, politically-driven rushed timetable. Slow down, carefully consider the bill, and carefully consider the deep cuts to Medicare already facing long term care providers.

For further information, contact Cedar Ridge Health and Rehab Center at (618) 537-6165. Cedar Ridge has pre-printed letters that the public can sign and they will even mail them for you as well as allowing computer access to send an e-mail. Cedar Ridge is located at One Perryman Street in Lebanon.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

As an Executive Director of a Skilled Nursing Facility, I am very concerned about the recent proposed Health Care Reform. As a citizen, I am just as concerned.

In my profession, this bill would be devastating. It would mean lay-offs and loss of jobs and less staff would certainly affect the quality of care our seniors receive. While our industry is not perfect, I see "small miracles" happen each and every day; it's so rewarding to see the bond that it developed between the staff and residents and the care that they receive. We also send people home. At Cedar Ridge Health and Rehab Center, we have a Homeward Bound Program in which people can come for short-term therapy and return home. We returned 75 individuals home last year and are on pace to send home 100 this year.

Skilled Nursing Facilities are truly the best bargain in health care. Acute care costs (\$2,000 a day), Its (\$1,500 a day), irfs (\$1,200 a day). Skilled Nursing Facilities are at \$400-\$500 a day, which is significantly lower and we provide so much care and services. For Medicaid, we receive under \$120.00 a day, but those residents receive the same great care. Yet they want to cut our industry even more!

As a citizen, this bill scares the heck out of me. I ask if you understand all of the hidden things in this bill? This will affect not only the care that our residents receive but also the care that you and I will receive. In essence, I feel that someone else now will have a say over my life. I don't believe that the government should have a say in whether someone can live or die however this is certainly the way things look. Do you realize the bill contains such items as: *There will be a government committee that decides what treatments and benefits you get; a Health Choices Commissioner will choose your Health care benefits for you, you have no choice! In addition, the government will have real-time access to individuals' finances and a National ID Health card will be issued; Government will reduce physician services for Medicaid, Seniors, and low income; Government will restrict enrollment of special needs people; Government mandates program for orders for end of life; the government will decide what level of treatment you will have at end of life.*

Those items are just a few of the many things "hidden" in the bill. Not only will this affect the care and services our elderly are currently receiving, it will affect almost every one of us. I am proud to be an American. I oversee a Skilled Nursing Facility that includes among its residents, highly decorated veterans; individuals that have fought to preserve our freedom. I feel that this legislation takes away freedom of choice among many other things. Feel free to stop by Cedar Ridge and I will be glad to give you a handout that breaks down this bill. You will be shocked in what you see!

Our voices can be heard though but we must act now! Please contact your Congressmen and ask them to vote "NO" for this bill. Yes we need health car reform but it should be thought out and not rushed through without looking at the total impact it will have. Please feel free to stop by Cedar Ridge Health and Rehab Center and we will give you a pre-printed letter to sign or give you access to the computer to let your voice be heard. It will literally take a few minutes of your time to let your voice be heard!

Mike Altobella