



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF GENERAL SURGEONS

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THE ASGS RESPONSE TO H.R. 3200

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The current debate in Washington over healthcare reform has highlighted the complexity of this most vital of human services. General surgeons are one of the most critical components of the healthcare delivery team, providing care for millions of trauma victims and cancer patients, as well as a wide variety of other common surgical ailments. If a rural hospital loses its general surgeon it is unable to maintain basic emergency services and likely must close. The importance of a trained general surgeon to any community cannot be overstated.

The American Society of General Surgeons (ASGS) is the only national organization that represents exclusively practicing general surgeons and our membership is deeply concerned over the government's current efforts to hastily overhaul our nation's healthcare system. The ASGS recognizes the need to improve access to affordable, quality healthcare to all Americans. We also recognize that the patient-physician relation is a sacred trust that must be maintained, and physicians must be allowed to act as their patient's advocate at all times. This fundamental truth was recognized by Hippocrates and has remained an uncompromised value of our profession.

Unfortunately, the bill currently being debated in Congress, "America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009" (H.R. 3200) contains a number of provisions that run contrary to our basic professional values and commitments. For the reasons listed below, the ASGS opposes H.R. 3200 as it is currently written.

1. Patients must retain the right to choose their own insurance plan. The current proposal promises to push millions of Americans into a government controlled system by effectively eliminating private options.
2. The need for fundamental reform of our medical liability system has been well documented, yet this critical component which could result in significant reduction in healthcare cost has been left out of the proposed legislation.
3. Compensation for general surgical care under the failed Medicare system has been inadequate for decades. The proposed "Public Option" promises reimbursement based on that same system. This will drive many general surgeons out of practice and deter young physicians from pursuing general surgery as a career, significantly decreasing access to these critical healthcare services.
4. As currently structured, general surgeons who participate in Medicare will automatically be enrolled in the government's "Public Option" plan, denying them the fundamental American right to choose.

The ASGS welcomes the opportunity to assist all those who seek to improve the health of all Americans. We recognize that sustainable improvements in our healthcare system can only be achieved if all those affected are engaged in the process. The ASGS leadership stands ready to represent practicing general surgeons and all those who have dedicated their lives to the welfare of our patients and the integrity of our honored profession.

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