

the Reporter

Illinois Hospital Association



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ONCE AGAIN, A NURSE STAFFING BILL

A bill that would mandate minimum nurse-patient ratios for specific hospital units – ratios more stringent than California’s – has been introduced in the General Assembly. **HB392** was filed last week by Rep. Mary Flowers (D-Chicago).

This is the fifth year in a row that a nurse-patient ratio bill has been proposed in Illinois. IHA has strongly opposed similar bills in recent legislative sessions and is working to block this bill. Since last summer, IHA and the Illinois Organization of Nurse Leaders have collaborated to develop an advocacy strategy and resources to help nurse executives conduct open and informed discussions with nursing staff on this issue. These materials, as well as a briefing paper that members can use when talking to their legislators, are available on IHA’s web site, www.ihatoday.org.

RESPONSE TO BUSH HEALTH CARE PLAN MIXED

The health care changes proposed by President Bush in his State of the Union address brought cautious reactions from provider groups. They approved of his acknowledgement of the uninsured problem, but expressed concern about his proposed solution. Responding to his proposal to cut reimbursements to some hospitals and redirect \$30 billion of federal Medicare disproportionate share (DSH) and capital funds to grants to states for expanding coverage for the uninsured, AHA said “the President’s proposal pulls the rug from under safety net hospitals that care for our nation’s most vulnerable people.” The Catholic Health Association expressed concerns about “any plan that would eliminate funding for hospitals and providers that care for low-income, elderly populations.”

Another of the President’s initiatives would equalize the tax treatment of those who buy private health insurance with that of people who receive tax-free coverage through their employers. Under the President’s proposal, tax deductions of \$7,500 for individuals and \$15,000 for families would be allowed for purchasing health insurance, regardless of whether it is done privately or through an employer.

Critics of the proposal say employers may be tempted to drop health coverage or offer worse coverage, if workers can get a deduction for buying coverage – forcing workers, especially those with serious ailments, into plans that offer less choice of doctors and higher deductibles. Critics also say deductions are less valuable to lower-income people who are at lower tax rates.

JOIN ADVOCACY DAY FEB. 13

IHA, AHA, MCHC, and Families USA are urging hospital leaders to participate in an important advocacy day to be held Feb. 13 in Washington, D.C. The goals are to garner support for reauthorization of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), set to expire in September, and to stop the Administration-proposed Medicaid cuts. Despite opposition in 2006 from 55 senators and 300 representatives, on Jan. 18 CMS published a proposed rule that would limit Medicaid reimbursement to cost for public hospitals and narrow the definition of government provider. This would jeopardize health care services for millions of low-income, elderly, and disabled people in Illinois and across the nation.

The day’s activities will kick off with a morning briefing at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, followed by coordinated member visits to Capitol Hill. For

