



Editorial Comment

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The 81st Texas legislative session began and once again issues related to the well being of the public will be brought to our legislators for consideration. No doubt, some of the discussion will be heated. As the voice of Texas physicians, The Texas Medical Association (TMA) is supporting a list of priorities for this session. Among these are:

Health insurance code of conduct: There will be discussions about how health insurance companies are held accountable to their promises to patients and to providers. Among the items on the table are being more transparent about coverage cancelation, premium calculations and disclosure of criteria used to determine physician performance.

Medical liability reform: Following the 2003 Texas Liability Reform, there are new attempts to change and or modify this legislation which caps pain and suffering awards. TMA is committed to convince the Texas Legislature that this law should be left unchanged.

Graduate medical education: This item supports increasing graduate medication funding. Texas has more medical students graduating than number of residency positions. When forced to leave the state for graduate medical education, many physicians do not return to Texas.

Physician loan repayment program: This enhances funding and includes physician incentives for practicing in underserved areas. This would greatly benefit rural and border regions.

Free Standing Emergency Departments (FSED): To ensure that FSED provide safe, high-quality, and appropriate emergency care, minimum operating criteria should be established. TMA will support a bill creating rules and regulations in this area.

Special Needs Populations: This includes continuing support for expanding the Medicaid and CHIP programs and expanding access to mental health programs.

Others: Though no less important than those named above, these include reimbursement improvements for vaccines, banning smoking in pub-

lic areas, obesity prevention initiatives, corporate practice of medicine and health facility investment issues, strengthening relationships between physicians and the Texas Medical Board, health information technology and scope of practice of healthcare providers.

The issues are many and the time legislators have to address each is limited. We must remain vigilant of the discussions around these issues and when necessary help to put a face on the issue by having our voices and those of our patients heard.

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