

**ORAL TESTIMONY TO HOUSE LABOR, HHS, EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**By Dr. Lori Heim, AAFP President**  
**May 12, 2010**

Good Morning Chairman Obey and members of the subcommittee. I am Dr. Lori Heim, a family physician from Vass, North Carolina.

As the President of the American Academy of Family Physicians representing 94,700 family doctors, residents and medical students, I congratulate the Congress on the enactment of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*.

In order for a successful implementation of health care reform, I urge you to increase the federal investment in primary care workforce.

Despite the consensus that good primary care is essential to genuine health reform, sixty-five million Americans – about one in five – live in primary care shortage areas.<sup>1</sup>

**Title VII Primary Care Training Needs**

Not only do we have shortages of primary care physicians in practice, the medical education “pipeline” is now only producing 22.6 % primary care physicians – down from 33 percent a decade ago. As a result, we have fewer primary care physicians being trained to care for the newly insured.

Health reform includes a number of provisions to increase the workforce including the vital primary care medicine grants authorized under Title VII.

We believe a minimum of \$600 million for all of the Title VII Programs is needed. We also urge the Committee to provide \$170 million<sup>2</sup> for the Title VII Section 747 Primary Care Training and Enhancement programs.

**Rural Health Needs**

Physician shortages are particularly hard on rural Americans who face more barriers to care than those in urban and suburban areas. Family physicians provide the majority of care for America’s underserved and rural populations,<sup>3</sup> so we were pleased by the new Rural Physician Training Grants authorized by health reform. We request that you fully fund the Title VII Rural Physician Training Grants.<sup>4</sup>

**Teaching Health Centers**

The AAFP supported the authorization and \$230 million in trust funds for the innovative Teaching Health Centers program to train primary care residents in non-hospital settings where most primary care is delivered.

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1[1] Bodenheimer T, Pham H. Primary Care: Current Problems and Proposed Solutions. *Health Affairs*. May 2010.

2[2] This figure is based on the recommendation of the HRSA Advisory Committee on Training in Primary Care Medicine and Dentistry’s recent report minus the dentistry funding plus the authorized level for the new integrative academic administrative unit grants.

3[3] Hing E, Burt CW. Characteristics of office-based physicians and their practices: United States, 2003–04. Series 13, No. 164. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2007.

4[4] \$4 million for Rural Physician Training Grants (Title VII, Section 749B)

However, if this program is to be effective, there must be grant funds for planning. We recommend that the Committee appropriate the full authorized amount for the Teaching Health Centers development grants of \$50 million for FY 2011.<sup>5</sup>

### **National Health Service Corps**

Another significant barrier to the production of primary care physicians is student debt.<sup>6</sup> The National Health Services Corps has long provided debt relief to primary care physicians and helped to reduce health disparities. We urge that the Corps receive \$414.1 million in FY 2011.

### **Primary Care Extension Program**

The AAFP commends Congress for authorizing the Primary Care Extension Program within the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Small primary care practices need the kind of support offered to farms by the federal Cooperative Extension Service to implement innovation and best practices.<sup>7</sup>

This new program will assist primary care providers in transforming their practices and using effective, evidence-based therapies and techniques in their practices.

The AAFP recommends that the Committee provide \$731 million for AHRQ to provide for the funding requested in the President's budget as well as the important new Primary Care Extension program authorized by the health reform law at \$120 million.

Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to testify today.

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5[5] Teaching Health Centers (Title VII Section 749A)

6[6] The Robert Graham Center. *Specialty and Geographic Distribution of the Physician Workforce: What Influences Medical Student & Resident Choices?* March 2, 2009.

7[7] Grumbach K, Mold JW. A Health Care Cooperative Extension Services: Transforming Primary Care and Community Health. *JAMA*, June 24, 2009—Vol 301, No. 24.