

Hospitals: Sensible reform is needed

It must be bipartisan, cost-effective, they say

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Health care reform is needed, but changing the system is a major challenge, hospital officials say.

"I can't believe there's anybody in the country that is saying, 'Hey, the status quo is acceptable,'" said Dave Fish, chief executive of St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls.

"However we redesign or change the health care system, I think it has to be done in a thoughtful manner, I think it has to be done in a bipartisan manner, and I think it needs to address a multitude of issues," Fish said Wednesday.

Those issues include variations in health care delivery and cost across the country, greater



Fish



Quinn



demand on a limited number of health care providers, and disparity in Medicare payments, George Quinn, senior vice president of the Wisconsin Hospital Association, said Wednesday.

U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl, D-Wis., said in Eau Claire this week he doubts major health care changes will be made by Congress this year. A bill could reach the U.S. Senate floor in September, but it is unlikely to contain any sweep-

ing reforms that he wants, such as government-negotiated prices for medication, Kohl said.

"There are too many politics involved," the senator said.

Quinn said the WHA opposes one of the most controversial reforms, the public option to compete with private insurance.

"We think that will go a long way to diminishing or damaging what we already have in Wisconsin," which is quality care and nearly everyone being covered, he said. Instead,

his organization could support measures to further increase and enhance access, possibly through changes in insurance regulations, Quinn said.

Randall Linton, Luther Midelfort president and chief executive, said variations in health care delivery and payment cannot be ignored.

"Medicare, as most traditional insurance does, pays for doing things not based on the quality and the outcomes," he said Wednesday. "The more you do, the more you get

paid. That's a perverse incentive that does not directly get to the issue of how you control cost."

Regarding payment for health care, Medicare payment rates to Wisconsin hospitals already are inadequate, they said, and Linton called paying for all health care under a similar method "untenable."

"We already know Medicare is going broke," he said.

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