BCBSMA Survey Shows Opportunity to Improve Access, Affordability and Quality of Health Care

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Physician and general public attitudes about health care in Massachusetts released today at Physician Summit 2003, sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

In recent focus groups and surveys commissioned by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA), physicians in Massachusetts say they generally like what they do, although some claim that practicing medicine is more difficult than it used to be. The survey showed that most patients are not aware of the problems their physicians face, because doctors seem to be shielding them from these issues. Patients say they can easily get an appointment anytime they want, and that their doctor spends enough time with them.

These results show that in a market of world-class doctors and health care institutions, public confidence has remained high despite the many problems within our health care system. In addition, the efforts by doctors to spend time with patients and shield them from the problems of the system illustrates their continued professionalism and commitment.

"Everyone knows that the health care system has serious problems," said Dr. James Fanale, Chief Medical Officer of BCBSMA. "But a lot of people don't realize that the continuing dedication of Massachusetts doctors and the goodwill of patients gives us a tremendous opportunity to repair the system, before the damage becomes irreparable. To that end, we convened a summit of Massachusetts physicians to identify ways to improve access, affordability and quality of care."

The Physician Summit 2003: Access, Affordability, Quality Care was held today at the Boston office of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. BCBSMA commissioned the surveys and convened the Summit to engage physician leaders in a dialogue of the key issues they face today and to help develop a health care agenda for the future. BCBSMA invited leaders from the medical and business communities, members of the state

Ten physicians presented their summaries of the most pressing issues in health care today. The issues range from rising practice and malpractice costs, patient access to quality care and ever-increasing demands on physicians' time. Dr. Charles Welch, President of the Massachusetts Medical Society, also addressed the summit. Andrew Dreyfus, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, presented Health Care in the Headlines.

The physician presenters were:

- Madeleine Biondolillo, MD, of Urban Medical Group
- James Butterick, MD, of Southcoast Hospitals Group of Fall River
- John Chessare, MD, of Boston Medical Center
- Steven Flier, MD, of Personal Physicians HealthCare
- Edward Gogel, MD, of Northeast Health Systems in Beverly
- Tom Lee, MD, of Partners HealthCare
- James O'Connell, MD, of Boston Medical Center
- Stephen Sweet, MD, of Baycare Health Partners of Springfield
- Jeffrey Weilburg, MD, of Massachusetts General Physician Organization.

Other survey results showed physicians and the public are in agreement, both rating the quality of health care in Massachusetts as good to excellent. They disagree, however, about what the future holds for medicine if changes are not made.

Some physicians responded that if practice costs, especially malpractice insurance premiums, continue to increase and reimbursement rates continue to decrease, doctors might leave the profession entirely, either retiring early or going into another profession.

The public accepts the fact that physicians are no longer making as much money as they have in the past. Most people (73 percent) believe that the current malpractice insurance system needs substantial changes. However, the public does not believe that large numbers of physicians are going to retire early, leave the state, or leave the profession in large numbers.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.com) was founded 65 years ago by a group of community-minded business leaders. Today, headquartered in Boston, BCBSMA provides coverage to 2.4 million members. Consistently recognized for standards of service that are among the highest in the nation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is the choice for health care consumers seeking reliable and high quality health care coverage. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association.