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**Broad Spectrum of Providers Poised to Ease
Primary Care Shortage**
*Concerns increase about meeting growing need
for health care services*

WASHINGTON – As health care reform is implemented, experts worry about whether there are enough primary care providers available to care for newly insured patients. One key to ensuring patients' needs are met is to promote access to all health care providers, including those who are not doctors of medicine (MDs) or osteopathy (DOs). That's the aim of the Coalition for Patients' Rights™ (CPR), established to protect patients' access to health care services and choice of providers.

According to a new study from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were 46.3 million American adults without health insurance in 2009.ⁱ With the passage of health reform, it is expected that a vast majority of these individuals will gain access to coverage and will be seeking prevention, wellness and disease management services.

Yet, there is growing concern that this influx of new patients will mean that there will not be enough primary care providers available to meet the demands on the system. It is estimated that there could be a deficit of up to 200,000 physicians alone over the next 15 years.ⁱⁱ With an aging population and expanded health insurance coverage, even physicians recognize that the increase in demand for care will exceed their capabilities.

"Health care in our nation has taken a new path with the passage of health reform," said Karen Kelly Thomas, a spokesperson for the Coalition. "One of the most immediate concerns is how to address increasing primary care needs. There are millions of skilled and capable health care professionals who have the ability to ease the stress on the system, and who offer high-quality and cost-effective care."

In alleviating the shortage of primary care providers, the Coalition believes patients should be able to receive care from all health care professionals who are qualified to provide primary care – including non-MDs/DOs. These professionals include nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives and naturopathic physicians, among others. Other health care professionals often serve as members of multidisciplinary treatment teams in primary care settings — such as psychologists, physical and occupational therapists, audiologists, certified registered nurse anesthetists and optometrists.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced \$15 million in funding to increase the number of health care providers and strengthen the primary care workforce. HHS awarded the funds for the operation of 10 nurse-practitioner led health clinics that assist in training nurse practitioners. Many of these clinics provide vital health care services to those living in medically underserved communities.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Without the contributions of these professionals, many patients would lack essential health care services and options, especially those in rural communities and areas with primary care provider shortages,” continued Kelly Thomas. “While physician groups are still focusing on old turf wars aimed at restricting the roles of other primary care providers, it’s clear that patients need quality caregivers, and they need them now.”

Competent and well-prepared, Coalition-member providers complete years of education in their respective specialties and meet rigorous licensing and/or certification standards. They have long been recognized by state and federal agencies as qualified and essential contributors to the health care system.

“Many professions arose as a direct result of patients’ needs and gaps in services,” said Kelly Thomas. “With an increasing need to promote healthy behaviors from childhood, the simple number of patients who need care, and an aging population, access to these providers is critical. At the Coalition for Patients’ Rights, we are dedicated towards preserving this access.”

“Access to the right health care professionals should be determined by the best interests of patients, who need high-quality and cost-effective care now,” said Kelly Thomas. “The health care community needs collaborative efforts to meet these growing demands for patient care.”

For more information about the Coalition and the health care professionals available to patients, visit www.patientsrightscoalition.org.

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About the Coalition for Patients’ Rights™

A national coalition of more than 35 organizations, the Coalition for Patients’ Rights represents more than three million licensed and certified health care professionals committed to ensuring comprehensive health care choices for all patients. It was formed in 2006 in response to divisive efforts by the Scope of Practice Partnership (SOPP), an alliance of medical and osteopathic physician organizations including the American Medical Association (AMA), which aims to limit the scopes of practice of other health care professionals.

The Coalition is comprised of a diverse array of health care professionals, including registered nurses, naturopathic doctors, psychologists, audiologists, physical and occupational therapists, advanced practice registered nurses (certified registered nurse anesthetists, nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives and clinical nurse specialists), optometrists and chiropractors.

For more information about the Coalition for Patients’ Rights, visit www.patientsrightscoalition.org.

ⁱ Robin A. Cohen, Ph.D., statistician, National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Sara Collins, Ph.D., vice president, Program on Affordable Health Insurance, Commonwealth Fund; June 16, 2010, *Health Insurance Coverage: Early Release of Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2009* <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/insur201006.htm>

ⁱⁱ Council on Physician and Nurse Supply. “Council Calls on White House to Convene Conference on Physician and Nurse Supply” <http://www.physiciannursesupply.com/Articles/council-release-feb-08.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, “Sebelius Announces New \$250 Million Investment to Strengthen Primary Health Care Workforce” <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/06/20100616a.html>