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Healthcare Reform and the Importance of Primary Care *Comparing the Presidential Candidates' Healthcare Plans*

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—The respective healthcare plans proposed by presidential candidates Sens. John McCain and Barack Obama each provide a different direction and focus for healthcare reform. Both plans recognize the importance of primary care in any major reform effort.

“Regardless of approach, research (especially from Barbara Starfield, M.D., as well as the Commonwealth Fund) has shown that a strong primary care infrastructure reduces cost, improves outcomes and reduces health disparities, stated Randy Wexler, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.A.F.P., a family physician in Gahanna, Ohio.

McCain’s healthcare reform proposal supports new treatment models with respect to chronic disease, calling for payment reforms of Medicare and TRICARE, the U.S. military’s healthcare plan, by compensating providers for diagnosis, prevention and care coordination, according to a comparison of the candidates’ healthcare plans compiled by the American Academy of Family Physicians Government Relations Division. Obama’s plan would support healthcare providers who implement care management programs and encourage team care through medical home models. Obama’s proposal would require insurers to pay for prevention, cancer screenings and diagnostic tests in an attempt to keep people healthy rather than paying for coverage when they are sick.

“Seeing your family physician on a regular basis improves the treatment of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure or diabetes, and increases prevention such as receiving flu shots and cancer screening, said Wexler.

McCain’s plan would provide a tax credit of \$2,500 for individuals and \$5,000 for families to help them purchase insurance policies on the open market. At the same time, it would eliminate tax exclusions for employer-sponsored health insurance. This represents a change from the current system. McCain’s plan also promotes the rapid deployment of 21st century information systems and technology that allows doctors to practice across state lines.

Obama’s plan calls for universal healthcare coverage by the end of his first term. His plan would require large employers to offer employee health benefits or contribute to the cost of a new national health plan (NHP). It also would create a national health insurance exchange to give small businesses and individuals without access to other public programs or employer-based coverage the opportunity to enroll in the NHP or a government-approved private plan. The national health insurance exchange is based on the federal employee health benefits plan. His plan does not require adults to carry insurance, but would mandate insurance coverage for

children. Obama's plan would invest \$10 billion a year over the next five years to move the U.S. healthcare system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems, including electronic health records.

In summary, Wexler stated, "The candidates' plans approach healthcare reform from different perspectives. Regardless of who is elected, it will be necessary for the next president to ensure adequate access to primary care to address the myriad of issues facing the American healthcare system."

Ohio Academy of Family Physicians does not endorse either Sen. McCain or Sen. Obama.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.



FACT SHEET

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McCain's Plan

- Supportive of new treatments models with respect to chronic disease
- Calls for reforms of Medicare and TRICARE
- Promotes rapid deployment of 21st century information systems and technology that would allow doctors to practice across state lines
- Would provide a tax credit of \$2,500 for individuals and \$5,000 for families to help purchase insurance policies on the open market
- Would eliminate tax exclusions for employer-sponsored health insurance

Obama's Plan

- Supportive of healthcare providers who implement care management programs and encourage team care through medical home models
- Would require insurers to pay for prevention, cancer screenings and diagnostic tests
- Would invest \$10 billion a year over the next five years to move the U.S. healthcare system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems, including electronic health records
- Calls for universal healthcare coverage by the end of his first term
- Would require large employers to offer employee health benefits or contribute to the cost of a new national health plan
- Would create a national health insurance exchange to give small business and individuals without access to other public programs or employer-based coverage the opportunity to enroll in the NHP or government-approved private plan
- Would mandate insurance coverage for children

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Source: American Academy of Family Physicians