



Report from the Front Lines:

**AS UNINSURED PATIENTS TURN TO EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS
FOR CARE OF UNTREATED ILLNESS,
EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS CALL FOR COVERAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS**

Released by:

The American College of Emergency Physicians
with the support of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, Alexandria, VA

Hospital emergency departments in our nation's cities, suburbs and rural areas are providing care to millions of Americans without health insurance who are forced to let their illnesses go untreated because they have nowhere to turn for preventive care. According to a new survey, nearly three in five (57 percent) emergency physicians say that providing basic health insurance coverage to all Americans is the nation's most important health care goal.

The physicians surveyed overwhelmingly view providing health insurance to all Americans as the goal that should receive the greatest attention in reforming America's health care.

The American College of Emergency Physicians and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released the survey results in conjunction with *Cover the Uninsured Week*, the largest mobilization in history to support securing health coverage for all Americans, including the nearly 44 million Americans – including 8.5 million children – without health insurance.

Emergency physicians surveyed, on average, believe that almost one-third (30 percent) of the patients they treat are uninsured. Crowding in emergency departments persists. The vast majority of physicians surveyed (82 percent) said that their emergency departments were operating at or over capacity on weekdays, and an overwhelming nine in 10 (91 percent) said their ERs were at or over capacity on weekends.

In addition, emergency physicians predict the problem will continue to worsen. Almost three-fourths (72 percent) of all those surveyed said that the number of uninsured patients treated in their emergency departments has increased in the past year. The great majority expect the trend to continue, with 79 percent anticipating that they will treat even more uninsured patients over the next one to two years, while only 1 percent predicts a decrease in the number of uninsured.

The emergency physicians surveyed know firsthand the health risks of being uninsured:

- Most agree (67 percent) that uninsured patients treated in the ER tend to be sicker and have more serious medical conditions than patients who have health coverage.
- A large majority (74 percent) says that uninsured patients are more likely to die prematurely than patients with health coverage.
- Almost all agree (94 percent) that arranging follow-up care for uninsured patients with serious problems is more difficult than it is for insured patients. Securing routine follow-up care or specialist referrals and ensuring that prescriptions are filled are particularly difficult.

More of the physicians surveyed attribute the growing number of uninsured to a decline in employer-based health coverage (38 percent) and higher unemployment leading to a loss of benefits (20 percent) than to any other causes.

Regardless of what is causing the persistent increase in the number of Americans without health coverage, the distribution of physicians surveyed shows how widespread the problem is, touching communities of all sizes and in all areas of the country. Forty-two percent of the physicians surveyed work in urban hospitals, 42 percent in suburban hospitals and 16 percent in rural hospitals. Most (65 percent) work in counties with less than 1 million people. Slightly more than half of the physicians surveyed (56 percent) work in non-teaching hospitals, and 85 percent of them have worked in emergency medicine for at least five years.

METHODOLOGY:

Public Opinion Strategies, Alexandria, VA, conducted the national survey of 1,954 emergency physicians who are active members of the American College of Emergency Physicians and who provide direct patient care in an emergency department. The survey was conducted via the Internet. ACEP's membership of nearly 23,000 represents more than 70 percent of all emergency physicians in the United States. The survey was conducted March 15-March 25, 2004. The margin of error for a sample size of 1,954 is ± 2.22 percent.