

From my perspective

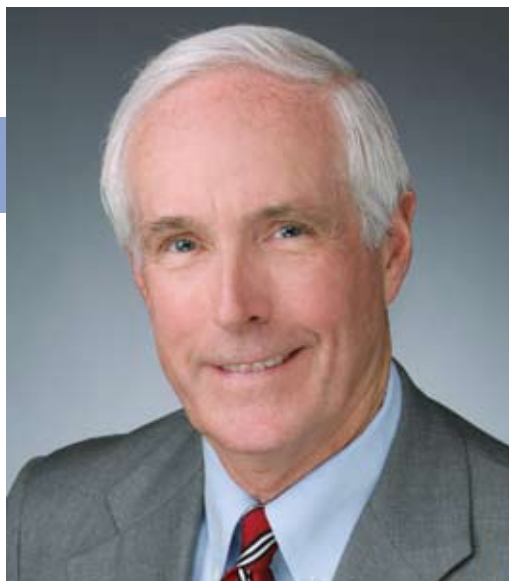
Most Americans—regardless of whether they are physicians, patients, policymakers, or leaders in the private care delivery system is unsustainable and dysfunctional. Throughout this decade, both government-run and private insurers have implemented policies and programs intended to address the system's inability to ensure patient access to quality medical and surgical care and to limit spending.

The demand for reform is intensifying. Indeed, in light of the nation's economic worries—the government-funded bailout of lending institutions, a roller coaster stock market, and increased unemployment—the government is likely to intensify its efforts to uncover sources of wasteful spending and to seek entirely new methods of providing health insurance coverage for all U.S. citizens. In fact, some experts believe that the questions of universal health insurance and the reform of our health care system will become the focus of intense national debate shortly after the inauguration of President-Elect Barack Obama early next year.

Never has the time been so ripe for physicians and other stakeholders to become actively involved in determining how to transform our health care system. As one of the nation's largest medical associations, the American College of Surgeons recognizes its acute obligation to help policymakers understand what changes should occur to improve care for surgical patients in this country.

I am pleased to report that the ACS Health Policy Steering Committee answered this charge by drafting a Statement on Health Care Reform, which outlines actions the College urges Congress and the incoming Presidential Administration to take concerning three critically important and interrelated goals for health care: quality and safety, access/workforce, and reduction of health care costs. The document sets forth for each of these priorities specific actions that the U.S. government should support, as well as related activities that the ACS is committed to undertaking.

The Board of Regents reviewed the draft document during its meeting just before the 2008 Clinical Congress, and it was shared with and reviewed by members of the ACS Board of Governors who were in attendance at a first-ever joint meeting of the Regents and Governors. Soon after it received final approval, we released the College's Statement



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on Health Care Reform to our members and to all other interested parties. It is printed on pages 5–9 of this issue of the *Bulletin*.

The College anticipates that this statement will be a useful starting point for further negotiation and for the elucidation of ideas from the broad range of stakeholders. In other words, the College's leadership views the Statement on Health Care Reform as simply one step in our efforts to effectively collaborate with patients, payors, other providers, and the business sector to create a better health care system—one grounded in the principles of quality, patient safety, efficiency, and equitable access to care.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS

If you have comments or suggestions about this or other issues, please send them to Dr. Russell at fmp@facs.org.