

Doctors Scrutinize Defensive Medicine, Surgeons Oppose Senate Reform Bill

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Doctors and lawyers are disputing the true costs of defensive medicine, while surgeons oppose provisions being considered by the Senate for health reform.

The [Seattle Times](#) reports that "defensive medicine" is under scrutiny as part of the congressional consideration of health care reform. "Doctors say the hidden costs of the tests along with malpractice insurance and lawsuit awards are major drivers behind the soaring cost of care. Trial attorneys say bad medicine, not lawsuits, is to blame." Democrats generally have taken the lawyers' side while Republicans have pushed for malpractice reform.

The feud "has made it tough to put an accurate price tag on the cost of the issues. ... Doctors say the price of defensive medicine and malpractice insurance accounts for up to 10 percent of health care spending. Lawyers say malpractice settlement costs amount to less than 0.5 percent of the \$2.5 trillion spent each year on health care. The cost of annual malpractice premiums can vary wildly depending on specialty, geographic location and insurance carrier" (LeBlanc, 11/4).

[The Hill](#) reports that groups representing surgeons delivered a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., laying out their opposition to Senate proposals for health care reform. "The critical dispatch from American College of Surgeons contrasts sharply with its July endorsement of the House's original healthcare reform bill. The surgeons, like the American Medical Association (AMA) and other physician groups, backed the House measure in large part because it included a permanent reform the Medicare's broken payment system for doctors, which must be adjusted by Congress each year to prevent steep cuts."

"The surgeons object to funds for surgeons being redirected to primary care physicians; a proposal to create an independent commission on Medicare payment policy that would not require congressional action to take effect; requirements that doctors participate in a quality measurement program; and other components of the [Senate] Finance Committee bill ... [including] the Senate's decisions to not enact a permanent reform to the Medicare payment system and to not enact limits on lawsuits for medical malpractice" (Young, 11/4).

[Congress Daily](#) reports: "Surgeons are becoming more and more vocal as they break from the physician pack in their protest of Democratic healthcare proposals, sending Senate leaders a warning letter Wednesday and aiming to stir the pot at this weekend's American Medical Association meeting in Houston. ... Six surgical groups, including the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the American Society of General Surgeons and the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, plan during AMA's conference to force a debate on AMA's original support for the House bill" (Edney, 11/5).

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