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Natasha Demehri: Medical school will feature the uninsured

Natasha Demehri • My View • April 12, 2010

As medical students, we constantly see what happens when underinsured patients can't afford some care. It's heartbreaking.

The President Obama recently signed legislation designed to expand access to health insurance for more than 30 million U.S. residents, but even that doesn't provide a complete health safety net.

While all Americans, whatever our political views, wait to see how this new law evolves, we students at the Florida State University College of Medicine also want to make sure people understand the high social costs of inadequate health care coverage. We have a variety of Cover the Uninsured Week events coming up.

As a second-year medical student, I have worked in hospitals and clinics throughout Tallahassee, as well as clinics in rural India, Costa Rica and Uganda. Regardless of the location, I saw tragedies surface as patients were denied treatment or could not afford necessary medical care because they lacked coverage. Even at our own university, some students can't afford to be treated for serious ailments because of the high costs of laboratory tests and medications that insurance usually would cover.

Currently, 47 million Americans, including more than 9 million children, are living without health insurance. In Florida, 19.8 percent are uninsured — ranking us 48th out of 50 states, according to the United Health Foundation. The new law will extend

coverage to millions and help focus on preventive health care.

How much, and how quickly, the new law will help remains to be seen. But in one way or another it will affect every U.S. citizen — whether a child receiving health care coverage for the first time, a physician attempting to organize the new influx of patients, or a medical student eagerly awaiting the outcomes of the reform.

To help our fellow students and the community understand the significance and complexity of covering the uninsured, the College of Medicine has planned events for this week. Most of them are at our building, 1115 W. Call St. Here are some of the events:

- Today, 6-7 p.m.: A panel of third- and fourth-year medical students will discuss how working with uninsured patients has affected them on their rotations.
- Tuesday, noon-1 p.m.: A special Journal Club lunch meeting will discuss breast cancer and preventive medicine, discussing the new guidelines and preventive measures that relate to reform.
- Wednesday, 4-5:30 p.m.: "Critical Condition," a 2006 documentary that aired on PBS' "Point of View," will be shown at Florida State's Student Life Center. It follows four critically ill Americans struggling with being uninsured and how their lack of coverage affected their jobs, health, home, savings and lives.
- Thursday, noon-1 p.m.: A talk titled "The Community Health Centers Movement" will be the special Grand Rounds presentation in the

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medical school's auditorium. The speaker will be Dr. Marc L. Rivo, chief medical officer of Prestige Health Choice, who has been practicing for more than 20 years. After his residency, he spent time in Washington, D.C., where he administered the Title VII federal grant program budget to enhance family medicine and primary care in medical schools and residency programs.

- Thursday, 3-4:30 p.m.: Students will challenge faculty members in a "Jeopardy!"-type contest revolving around knowledge of the uninsured.
- Sunday, noon-4 p.m.: Students will take part in a Service Day at two locations, taking blood pressure and performing vision and body mass index screenings, among other things. The two locations are the Walmart at 4400 W. Tennessee St. and Cascade Village, 1620 Balkin Road. We don't want anyone to be uninformed about the uninsured.

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