

Issues and Insights:

The Dean's Perspective

Health care in America: Framing the debate

Many issues have captured the attention of the presidential campaigns during this election year, including a faltering economy, the war in Iraq, rising fuel costs, the growing numbers Americans without health insurance, and rising health care costs.

As physicians, we see the effects of the health care crisis every day in our practices — from declining reimbursement and increasing paperwork, to patients with no insurance or not enough insurance to cover their medical needs.

More than 15 percent of all Americans, nearly 46 million people, lack health insurance, and an additional 25 million are underinsured. Locally, according to a recent report released by the Montgomery County Healthcare Safety Net Task Force, 11 percent of county residents, or 60,300 people, are without health insurance.

This edition of *Vital Signs* tackles the health care crisis head on, looking at the issue from all sides — from the perspective of patients, hospitals, physicians, businesses, economists, and our own Center for Global Health Systems Management and Policy. As you'll see, there are no easy answers. But as physicians armed with information, we can begin to help frame the debate.



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