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Health care advocates grateful for spotlight on ailing U.S. system

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It is with great interest that we read "U.S. health care ailing" in the June 24 Times Union. Inspired by the release of the film "Sicko," this piece by Susan Brink of the Los Angeles Times brings to our attention serious deficiencies in our health care system.

The New York Chapter of the American College of Physicians, which represents over 11,000 internal medicine doctors across our state, has focused much of our advocacy activities on some of the very issues described in this article.

First and foremost is the issue of access to care. We cannot expect good health care outcomes when nearly 1 in 6 Americans lack health insurance. With NYACP's motto of "always putting patients first," we have lobbied for improved access to care and measures to move toward universal access to comprehensive, affordable, high quality health care at both the state and federal levels.

New Yorkers and all Americans must encourage our elected leaders and future candidates to make access to health care the nation's top priority.

Another key issue brought to light in this article is our management of chronic illnesses such as diabetes. While we excel at many "high end" services, our system frequently falls short on the everyday treatment that would prevent the need for many of these more costly services.

Our current system seems to place little value on the successful management of chronic illness. Much of this work is done by primary care physicians, who are an endangered species in many parts of the U.S., including much of New York. States with greater penetration of primary care physicians experience lower per capita Medicaid costs, yet we are failing to attract new doctors to this vital type of practice.

The American College of Physicians has endorsed and promoted the concept of the "Advanced Medical Home" in which patients receive better care coordinated through enhanced information systems and improved ancillary services and communication. This model would recognize the value of and reward practices for all aspects of patient care.

By focusing more of our resources on preventive services and chronic disease management, we can improve objective measures of care and reduce the mortality and morbidity of common chronic illnesses.

We welcome the exposure brought to this issue by your newspaper and hope it urges people to advocate for positive change in our health care system.

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