

## **PATIENTS' RIGHTS ARE AT RISK – HOW TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT** **By: Maureen Shekleton, Coalition for Patients' Rights™**

Our country's health system has taken center stage – its presence is everywhere. It's in the media, in the halls of Congress, in community town hall meetings and at many kitchen tables. As healthcare professionals, we're pleased to see this long overdue discussion taking place, but given the complexities of our nation's system, can it be fixed? How does one balance access, affordability and choice?

One organization that is working to make a difference is the Coalition for Patients' Rights. This national coalition, comprised of more than 35 organizations, represents over three million licensed healthcare professionals committed to ensuring comprehensive healthcare choices for all patients. The Coalition was formed in 2006 in response to a divisive movement by some medical groups to restrict the valuable services provided by healthcare professionals who are not doctors of medicine or osteopathy (MDs or DOs). This movement continues today, aiming to limit healthcare professionals' scopes of practice – the range of healthcare-related activities and services that a healthcare professional is educated, licensed and/or certified to provide.

The recent reform debate has also sparked discussions about physician shortages and the “need” for more doctors to provide care to patients. Unfortunately, many patients still believe that only a MD or DO can provide the medical help they seek. We need to reinforce to patients that doctors should not always be the default provider for medical care.

But there is so much more that needs to be considered. Patients have the right to access the healthcare provider they want. And they have the right to choose among them. Sadly, these rights get ignored more often than not. Many patients lack essential healthcare services and options, especially those in rural and medically underserved areas.

There are millions of healthcare professionals in the U.S. that can be utilized and tapped into as they are critical stakeholders in the movement to improve the nation's healthcare. These professionals represented by the Coalition – including optometrists, chiropractors, psychologists, registered nurses and advanced practice registered nurses (including certified registered nurse anesthetists, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse midwives), therapists, naturopathic physicians, practitioners of Oriental medicine and many other licensed healthcare professionals – are poised to meet the growing healthcare needs of Americans.

With growing demands on the American healthcare system – including an aging population, healthcare provider shortages, spiraling costs and more than 45 million uninsured Americans – the Coalition for Patients' Rights believes that now is the time for all healthcare professions to work together, not against one another, to advance the health and well-being of patients.

Members of the Coalition have come together to preserve patients' rights to choose among a broad spectrum of healthcare providers. The Coalition believes that access to a range of healthcare options ensures that patients are able to receive the right care at the right time. All individuals are different and, therefore, it is important for patients to be able to choose the type of provider that best suits their specific health and wellness needs. In today's healthcare system,

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many factors can play a role in patients' health decisions, including caregiver qualifications, affordability, bedside manner and accessibility. Shouldn't patients have the ability to choose?

For more information about the Coalition for Patients' Rights, visit [www.patientsrightscoalition.org](http://www.patientsrightscoalition.org).