I applaud the government’s interest and fervor for improving health care delivery in the United States. However, any mention of substantive health care reform must include several key inside-out elements. Otherwise, government spending will merely be symptomatic care, rather than addressing the root causes of increasing health care expenditures.

Health care coverage has simply become too cheap for Americans. Patients devour health care resources needlessly because they can. I regularly see patients who fully recover from symptoms but keep their appointment anyway. There is no consequence for overuse of services. Only when individuals become more accountable for their health expenditures will we see considerable savings. If Americans have any measurable control over their health care costs, savings will naturally follow.

MALPRACTICE REFORM

Many physicians find themselves subconsciously ordering tests and procedures for fear of litigation. I regularly hear the refrain, “I wouldn’t normally order this test, but in Philadelphia [with its malpractice climate] I feel obliged to.”

Recent bills in Congress advocating health care courts to settle malpractice claims and safe harbors of practice are truly on the mark. However, without caps on pain and suffering for malpractice awards, the gains in savings will be meager. Caps have transformed the practice environment in both California and Texas. The evidence for their effectiveness in transform-

ELIMINATE THE MIDDLE MAN

Physicians, not bureaucrats, should make medical decisions. The bureaucracy the system endures is simply not sustainable. In an effort to save costs, insurers have added layers of precertifications and approvals before tests and procedures are allowed. The costs of this ultra-regulation are exorbitant. Let physicians care for patients and allow them to prescribe what is necessary—not what will protect them from a lawsuit.

Best practices are to be encouraged so that efficient and effective care is rewarded.

Dr Kelly is from Penn Sports Medicine Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dr Kelly has no relevant financial relationships to disclose.

Correspondence should be addressed to: John D. Kelly IV, MD, Penn Sports Medicine Center, 235 S 33rd St, Philadelphia, PA 19104 (john.kelly@uphs.upenn.edu).

doi: 10.3928/01477447-20110826-01

Furthermore, if physicians were granted the opportunity to pass the potential savings gained by less use of excessive tests on to providing for the poor and less advantaged, the insurance crisis would be eradicated. Today, most know that savings are passed to insurance company profits, not for service to the needy. Left to their own designs, most physicians know
which tests will truly potentially affect treatment vs which are performed for defensive reasons or to indulge a patient. For example, it is important to consider how many childhood vaccines could be distributed with the $1300 savings obtained by forgoing one unnecessary MRI.

**SELF-REGULATION**

As health care providers, we need to do a better job of policing ourselves. If a physician is not acting in the best interests of his or her patients, then fellow physicians are obliged to address and correct the problem and discipline the offender, if necessary. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has been proactive in defining ethical and responsible care. It has released detailed standards of professionalism to which every practicing orthopedic surgeon is called to adhere. Not until physicians institute their own improvement standards will they stop being subjugated to the whims and false notions of those less informed.

**WORLD PEACE**

I regularly serve at the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Center and witness the true cost of war. The physical trauma our veterans sustain is meager compared to their psychic wounds. Depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and addictions are rampant among those who witness the ravages of war. Many veterans are doomed to a lifetime of constant medical and psychiatric care, not to mention the collateral physical damage that drug and alcohol abuse engender. The economic drain that war causes to our health care system is cataclysmic.

**RATIONAL GUN CONTROL**

In Philadelphia, we often see up to 400 homicides per year due to gun violence. The cost to society—both economic and psychic—from gunshot wounds and deaths is incalculable. It remains a frank mystery to me why assault weapons are allowed and why gun controls are not stricter. There is a nearly ten-fold reduction in firearm-associated fatality rates in Ireland as compared to the United States.

**INCENTIVIZATION**

For Americans, there is no incentive for the attainment of health and wellness. We will only see a change in behavior when Americans become more responsible for their own health and well being. Just as good drivers get rewarded for safe driving records, so too should Americans be incentivized to stay fit, obtain preventive services, and think twice about what they are putting into their bodies. A reduction in insurance premium for smoking cessation would effect positive change beyond measure.

**CULTURE**

Any mention of health care reform must address the degradation of values in this country. If government wishes to encourage health, it needs to reinforce the fundamentals: faith, family, self-care, and respect for the dignity of each individual. We are seeing increases in anxiety and depression like never before. Children are eating themselves into oblivion as a salve for the pain that only a sound moral center and rich family life can bring. The incidence of diabetes is skyrocketing: it is estimated that 366 million people suffer from this affliction worldwide. The increase in health care expenditures due to diabetes will be meteoric and will bankrupt insurers. Many of today’s youth are unfamiliar with the notion that only by living an honorable, service-oriented life will true self-respect and love be gained. True health care savings will be realized only when legislators recognize the need to return to the fundamentals our forefathers treasured: faith, family, and integrity.