



2016 Healthcare Legislative Wrap-Up

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The 109th General Assembly has adjourned sine die. As citizen legislators, we've all got different backgrounds. As I have written here previously, the Tennessee Senate is especially well represented by those in the medical field. We have four doctors, two pharmacists and one physical therapist. With their help and experience, the Senate has worked hard to increase access to meaningful healthcare at a reduced cost to patients.

Several bills enacted this year address specifically how patients interact with their personal physicians. The "Health Care Empowerment Act" removes state roadblocks to the growing Direct Primary Care (DPC) healthcare model. Under the DPC model, patients pay their doctors a monthly fee in return for agreed-upon primary care services. In order to be Obamacare-compliant, a patient may supplement a DPC membership with a high-deductible "catastrophic" insurance policy. The combined cost of monthly membership fees and insurance premiums is anticipated to be substantially lower than a traditional health insurance plan with co-pays, deductibles, and premiums.

Another new law provides that coverage and reimbursement for telehealth services cannot be impacted by the geographical location of the patient. Also this year, lawmakers voted to give women more convenient access to birth control by allowing them to go directly to a pharmacist to get a prescription. The new statute applies to women over the age of 18 and emancipated minors.

The General Assembly also worked to ease the burdens on those medical providers who serve in free clinics. One such law will allow civil immunity to persons who are involved in the free distribution of eyeglasses. Another helps ease the burden of rural free clinics by authorizing nurse practitioners or physician assistants who practice in such clinics to arrange for required chart reviews by a supervising physician in the physician's office or remotely via HIPAA-compliant electronic means instead of at the clinic site. Further, the General Assembly has enacted legislation allowing charitable clinics to directly employ physicians, optometrists, ophthalmologists, dentists and psychologists to continue to allow the organizations to provide access to comprehensive health care services to the most vulnerable citizens of the state.

When the 110th General Assembly convenes in January, we will continue to work to increase access to meaningful healthcare at reduced costs to patients.

Senator Norris practices in commercial litigation and business matters with Adams and Reese, LLP. He is Senate Majority Leader and represents West Tennessee in the state senate. For more information on the firm, visit www.adamsandree.com.

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The Memphis Medical Society

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