

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
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July 8, 2013

Editor, National Journal
The Watergate
600 New Hampshire Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Dear Editor:

In the June 20, 2013 edition of the *National Journal*, an article by Margot Sanger-Katz entitled, “Doctors Already Make More Than Enough Money,” does a complete disservice to the entire physician community.

Not only is Ms. Sanger-Katz clearly misinformed, she also ridicules physicians across the country by calling us “actors in health care.” As such, we would like to invite her or anyone who approved this piece to be published to come spend a week on-call with a neurosurgeon to see if we are really in this profession for the wrong reason.

Ms. Sanger-Katz was also quick to dismiss the potential access to healthcare problems that patients may experience. She even goes so far to suggest that it would be impossible for doctors to stop taking Medicare patients because it would be bad for “business.”

It is well established that the country faces a severe physician manpower shortage, which will be exacerbated as health insurance coverage is expanded to an additional 30 million Americans and the baby boomers continue to reach retirement age. Overall, the shortage will approximate 130,600 physicians by the year 2025 — 64,800 specialty physicians and 65,800 primary care physicians.

There are about 3,689 practicing board certified neurosurgeons for over 5,700 hospitals in the U.S., serving a population of more than 311 million people. As the population ages and more of our citizens face debilitating and life threatening neurological problems such as stroke, degenerative spine disease, and Parkinson’s, this supply-demand mismatch will become even more acute. Add to this supply-demand imbalance the concept of cutting federal reimbursement rates below what it costs to deliver the care, and access issues will only worsen.

Because our country is facing a ballooning federal national debt, it is obvious that everyone will take a “haircut,” including the Medicare provider community which will be absorbing a \$415 billion hit over the next decade. Perhaps, the *National Journal* should take another long hard look at who makes “more than enough” in the healthcare system, as it certainly isn’t primary care physicians. Earlier this month, it was reported that compensation “for the top management teams – the five-highest paid executives at each company – ranged from \$21 million at Humana to \$47 million at United Health.” And just last week, Kaiser Health News and ABC released a report containing compensation details for CEOs at dozens of top nonprofit and government-supported hospital systems.

Physicians who are giving care are certainly contributing to the health of American. Can these executives say the same thing? Perhaps evaluating the value added by these administrators would produce a "salubrious" affect."

Lastly, please be advised that we tried countless times to publish a response to this article in the comments section of your website, received confirmation that our comments were received, yet for some reason they never appeared. As a respected news outlet, we hope that this was a result of a website malfunction, rather than a purposeful lack of transparency or censorship. Publications such as yours are an essential part of the public discourse on important policy issues facing our nation, and as such, your readers should benefit from a wide range of perspectives on the topics on which you write.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



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