

The Softening: Declining Support for the Affordable Care Act

By Roger Stark, MD, FACS

In the now-famous words of former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, from 2010, “we have to pass this legislation (Affordable Care Act) to find out what’s in it.” Three years later even the most ardent supporters of the law realize it is too cumbersome and complex to actually work. President Obama himself is showing doubts. In a revealing slip, he said in a recent *New York Times* interview that the American public will like the law “if it works” – not **when** it works.

Democrats in Congress passed this 2,700 page, monstrosity of a law 3 ½ years ago with the hope it would work and that Americans would eventually accept it. Polls have consistently shown that the law has never enjoyed support of the majority of Americans.

The law’s cost estimates have exploded. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) originally determined a budget of \$940 billion over the first 10 years. The government started collecting revenue to pay for the ACA in 2010, as soon as the bill was signed into law, but benefits don’t start until 2014. The CBO has revised its original estimate to \$1.76 trillion, with added revenue coming from deeper cuts to Medicare and more taxes. Once benefits begin, costs are projected to skyrocket to \$2 to \$3 trillion for any 10 year period.

Even though we are experiencing a fragile recovery from the Great Recession, employers are not hiring or are cutting employee hours to less than 30 a week, because of the uncertainty of the ACA. Unions, once among the biggest supporters of the law, are upset that the ACA will eliminate their members’ generous health benefits and could destroy the 40 hour work week. The Administration has unilaterally delayed the employer mandate at least until 2015, which according to the CBO will add an additional \$12 billion to the country’s deficit. Earlier this year, the CBO reported that at least 7 million workers would lose their employer-provided health insurance.

The IRS is finding it does not have the capability to determine people’s income in a timely fashion. Consequently, the

Administration announced that individuals only need to self-report their wages to qualify for government (taxpayer) subsidized health insurance. Using this honor-system, the potential for fraud and abuse, and subsequent exploding costs, is now enormous.

Success of the ACA depends on the participation, and the payments, of young, healthy people. They need to sign up for health insurance and offset the costs of older, sicker individuals. Because the law forces insurance companies to sell policies to anyone, regardless of pre-existing health problems, the Administration is now worried that young people will simply pay the \$95-a-year penalty and wait until they become ill before purchasing health insurance. The government plans to spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars in the next few months on advertizing to encourage young adults to sign up for health insurance. If the law is so great, why the need for this huge ad campaign?

New taxes to help pay for the ACA will be levied on medical device manufacturers and drug companies. The U.S. Senate passed a bill this year to exempt medical device manufacturers, with support for repeal even coming from the most vocal proponents of the ACA.

Left-leaning publications, like *The New Republic*, are running articles wondering about the success of the ACA. Long-time ACA defender Jonathan Cohn wrote “whether it (ACA) works out neatly, obviously, remains to be seen.” Statements like this indicate a gradual softening in support for the law, even from its biggest backers.

The health care sector accounts for one sixth of our economy. With this much at stake, we need policies that build confidence that health care reform will work. When even the supporters of the ACA question its success and viability, it is time to repeal the law and start over. The patient, as an informed consumer of health care, should be the priority in health care reform, not the government.

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