



>> The Impact of a New Administration on the War on Cancer

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With the increase in U.S. health-care costs and the number of uninsured individuals, healthcare became an important ticket item during the recent election. Currently, 47 million Americans lack health insurance and one study found that five percent of all cancer patients are uninsured at the time of diagnosis.¹

Almost 40 years ago, President Richard Nixon declared a national war on cancer. With the passage of the National Cancer Act in 1971, the President's Cancer Panel was created to report to the current President of the United States on the development and execution of the National Cancer Program.² While there have been significant advances since Nixon's pledge, the current President's Cancer Panel (the Panel) has highlighted a combination of trends that require action to achieve more substantial reductions in cancer mortality and morbidity in the United States. According to Panel member Margaret Kripke, Professor Emerita of Immunology at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, the war on cancer "has to get back on the national political agenda."³

President-elect Barack Obama made healthcare reform a major focal point of his campaign. However, it is important to know how his proposals specifically address the needs of the cancer community.

Defining the Issues

The President's Cancer Panel convened four roundtable meetings between 2007 and 2008 to identify actions that could accomplish more substantial reductions in cancer mortality and morbidity. During these meetings, the Panel considered the perspectives of experts from government, industry, the advocacy community and those from the fields of medicine and public health. The Panel recommended the following three actions that are considered crucial to achieving reductions in cancer mortality and morbidity:⁴

1. Preventing and treating cancer must become a national priority.
2. All Americans must have timely access to needed healthcare and prevention measures.
3. The scourge of tobacco in America must end.

In addition to these broad action items, other issues of importance raised by the oncology community include catastrophic coverage, providing fair terms for health insurance, increasing the emphasis on preventative screenings, increasing funding for cancer research and reducing environmental risk factors.⁵

The Obama Healthcare Agenda

Since the Democratic primaries, President-elect Obama has campaigned for healthcare reform on the basis that no American should be denied healthcare and that every American should have access to insurance. His healthcare reform plan also addressed:

- Expanding coverage built on employer-based, Medicare, Medicaid and state Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP) programs
- Providing sliding scale subsidies to help small businesses provide insurance for their employees
- Strengthening competition in the insurance and drug market

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1. http://www.oncolink.org/custom_tags/print_article.cfm?Page=2&id=958&Section=Cancer_Resources

2. Margaret Kripke, a professor emerita of immunology at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston

3. Margaret L. Kripke, Ph.D., professor emerita, immunology, University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Houston; Kishan Pandya, M.D., professor, medicine and oncology, and clinical director, hematology-oncology,

James P. Wilmot Cancer Center, University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester, N.Y.; Maximizing Our Nation's Investment in Cancer: Three Crucial Actions for America's Health. <http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/advisory/pcp/pcp07-08rpt/pcp07-08rpt.pdf>

4. http://www.oncolink.org/custom_tags/print_article.cfm?Page=2&id=958&Section=Cancer_Resources

5. 2008 Specialty & Biotech Distributors Association (SBDA); Washington D.C. September 18, 2008.

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- Eliminating insurance discrimination based on pre-existing conditions⁶

Other healthcare initiatives supported by President-elect Obama include: disease management, coordination of care, pay-for-performance, comparative effectiveness, health information technology (HIT) in general and electronic medical records (EMR) in particular, and biogenetics⁷—all of which could have direct effects on the future of cancer care.

The Obama-Biden Plan to Combat Cancer

On September 5, 2008, the Obama campaign enhanced their healthcare agenda and released their plan to specifically combat cancer. The plan consists of 11 key initiatives, which address all three action steps deemed necessary by the Panel to reduce cancer mortality and morbidity, in addition to other priorities identified by researchers.⁸

Although many of the President-elect's initiatives appear to address the oncology community's call for action, there has been concern voiced over the timetable and financial sustainability for implementation of these initiatives. Considering the current economic crisis and the recent \$700 billion government bailout, there is considerable concern that there are

insufficient funds to implement many of these initiatives.

Also potentially worrisome for manufacturers is an Obama-created comparative effectiveness agency that could restrict patients' access to these innovative and potentially more expensive drugs and therapies.⁹ Specifically, a comparative effectiveness agency may have some of these effects on manufacturers and venture capitalists:

- Additional clinical and economic evidence may need to be established before government (and other payers) provide access to certain cancer products.

- Additional due diligence evaluations relating to likely reimbursement outcomes may be needed before providing further funding for product development.

However, the Obama presidency is not all bad news for pharmaceutical/biotech industry. Increased funding for oncology clinical trials (if the dollars are truly allocated by Congress) and improved coordination of the federal healthcare agencies could boost oncology innovation and increase the speed of approval timelines. In addition, if the President-elect is able to convince Congress to fund and implement healthcare coverage for all Americans, more patients would

President's Cancer Panel Action Steps	Obama-Biden Healthcare Initiatives for Cancer ¹⁰
Preventing and treating cancer must become a national priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve federal coordination of cancer research, treatment and awareness programs • Strengthen the medical workforce • Support advances in personalized medicine • Provide new supports to cancer survivors and their families
All Americans must have timely access to needed healthcare and prevention measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all Americans have access to healthcare • Ensure all Americans have access to preventive care • Improve access to clinical trials • End insurance discrimination • Double funding for cancer research • Support evidence-based quality improvement interventions
The scourge of tobacco in America must end	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify health impacts of environmental factors

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6. 2008 Specialty & Biotech Distributors Association (SBDA); Washington D.C. September 18, 2008.

7. <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/election2008/Obama-Biden%20Plan%20To%20Combat%20Cancer.pdf>

8. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122428260748146061.html>

9. http://www.oncolink.org/custom_tags/print_article.cfm?Page=2&id=958&Section=Cancer_Resources

10. http://www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/142/12_Part_1/996

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presumably have insurance coverage for drug therapies and potentially improved outcomes. In addition, Obama's stance on targeted and personalized medicine may result in increased support of research and other funding for such innovative treatments.

Finally the current economic downturn combined with Obama's proposal to end insurance discrimination will likely result in insurance companies re-structuring benefits and in patients carrying an increased share of their healthcare costs. Such a situation may result in an even greater need for support of co-payment foundation models, as well as an increased reliance on manufacturer-supported patient and drug assistance programs for high-cost products. Given the expected healthcare trends, such programs are here to stay and should be an important component of manufacturers' commercialization and access strategies.

What's Next?

President-elect Obama has developed a comprehensive and aggressive plan to improve healthcare and combat cancer. Many political pundits have speculated that the downturn in the economy will put his healthcare agenda on the backburner. However, with a Democratic president and congress, the stars may be aligned for significant healthcare changes to be enacted during Obama's term. All stakeholders should continue to care-

fully monitor not only his healthcare priorities, but economic, energy and international issues as well, as they will likely affect the priority of Obama's healthcare proposals on the 2009 agenda. **OBR**



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