DPC

DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

FACT SHEET

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Protecting the Doctor/Patient Relationship: S. 6 Prohibits Financial Incentives

The Democratic *Patients' Bill of Rights* prohibits financial incentives. Some doctors may be reluctant to refer patients to specialists because of financial penalties imposed by HMOs. Similarly, utilization workers can be influenced by contingency payments that encourage them to deny care. The Democrats' *Patients' Bill of Rights* would prohibit financial incentives to withhold care, both on providers and on utilization review professionals.

- The core of the doctor-patient relationship is a patient's trust that her doctor will give unbiased, objective advice based on medical knowledge. When physicians are subject to financial incentives, they may instead give advice based on financial considerations. Patients should not have to second-guess their own doctors' advice because of outside pressure coming from their insurers.
- Some physicians will resist the pressure from insurance companies and give their patients the care they need, because it is the right thing to do. These physicians should not be penalized financially for doing their job. Doctors should not have to choose between making their best judgement about necessary care and their own paychecks.
- Financial incentives put patients at risk and put the people making decisions about their care in an unfair position. The Democratic *Patients' Bill of Rights* would restrict these incentives and restore the doctor-patient relationship.

Financial incentives can have serious consequences. After Patrick Shea was hospitalized for severe chest pains during a business trip, Mr. Shea made several visits to his long-time family doctor, where he discussed his extensive family history of heart disease, and indicated he was suffering from chest pains, shortness of breath, muscle tingling, and dizziness. Unknown to Mr. Shea, his insurance plan had financial incentives that were designed to minimize referrals. Despite all the warning signs, Mr. Shea's doctor persuaded him that he was too young and did not have enough symptoms to justify a visit to a cardiologist. A few months later, Mr. Shea died of heart failure. According to Mr. Shea's widow, Dianne, if her husband had known his plan's incentive arrangements, he would have disregarded his doctor's advice, sought a cardiologist's opinion at his own expense, and would still be alive today.

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