

Huge Error on Medicare-Medicaid Cost Projections: Cures Not Factored

Though tough to believe, there's been a huge error in projected Medicare – Medicaid costs. The cost estimators, for puzzling reasons, have not included the discovery of cures of major diseases and disabilities but, instead, have primarily concentrated on rationing health services from pharmaceuticals, medical devices to hospitalization let alone physician accessibility. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that a cure for Alzheimer's would result in a savings of \$20 trillion over a 40-year period. Cures for heart disease, diabetes, cancer and autism alone would reduce costs by trillions upon trillions of dollars, which could be put to productive national uses. And, without doubt, the cures will come! But the question is, "When?"

In Michael Milken's recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece, "Investing in Science, Reaping Rewards," he correctly spells out the breathtaking medical promise of modern technology. For decades, our foundation has also stressed this exciting reality but also has, in addition, warned that the barriers to test them in clinical studies, the underappreciated critical step in making a discovery, are inexcusably prohibitive. As a result, numerous potential medical therapies remain laboratory ones instead of being available to patients. Our nation has an unbudgeable cultural blind spot to the true value of clinical research and is highly suspicious of it. To get around this, decades ago we began the call for physicians (doctornauts) to step to the plate and volunteer more easily for clinical studies. Who would object? This would result in testing of many more potentially promising therapies and speed up the discovery of cures. To make this happen would of Congress. We have over the years

unsuccessfully proposed the Doctornaut Act even when it was supported by former Senate Majority Leader and physician, Bill Frist.

It's both urgent and mandatory that the next Administration or Congress address ways to establish a "general" medical discovery system which would rapidly unleash our extensive pool of innovative medical minds and accelerate medical discovery for all diseases and disabilities, not only for specific targeted ones. It is interesting to note that Congress has never held a hearing on establishing a general medical innovative system, which is what patients want. They don't want free hospitalization. They want to be home, disease free.

In order to jump start the discovery process, and it will definitely jump start it, the Congress must enact the Doctornaut Act. Not too long ago, a discussion draft of it was circulated by Dr. Frist. It's a simple Act, five pages versus the 2,400 of the Affordable Care Act! To learn more about it visit www.fimdefelice.org, the website of FIM, the Foundation for Innovation in Medicine. We also believe that it's obligatory that for the costs estimators to immediately head back to their drawing boards and factor in various levels of "cure" rates and then recalculate costs. The results will widen eyes and, without doubt, be the stimulus to move the Administration or Congress to act.

It's not at all pie-in-the-sky to believe that we can dramatically reduce suffering, unnecessary death and Medicare-Medicaid costs within the near term. Just think about it.

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Editor's note: Dr. DeFelice is Chairman, FIM, the Foundation for Innovation in Medicine