

CLINICAL OBSERVATIONS

Support for National Health Insurance among U.S. Physicians: 5 Years Later

Background: The increasing costs of health care and health insurance have concerned Americans for some time (1). The number of uninsured Americans increased by 2.2 million to 47 million in the most recent census. This is the largest increase reported by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1992 (2). In a 2002 survey of physicians, we reported that 49% supported government legislation to establish national health insurance (3).

Objective: To determine whether physician opinion has changed in the 5 years since the 2002 survey and assess physicians' support for government legislation to establish national health insurance and their support for achieving universal coverage through more incremental reform.

Methods: We randomly sampled 5000 physicians from the American Medical Association Masterfile. We sent each physician a survey asking 2 questions: 1) In principle, do you support or oppose government legislation to establish national health insurance? and 2) do you support achieving universal coverage through more incremental reform? Question 1 was identical to the one we used in our 2002 study (3). Respondents answered using a 5-point Likert scale. We also gathered data on physician membership organizations and demographic, personal, and practice characteristics.

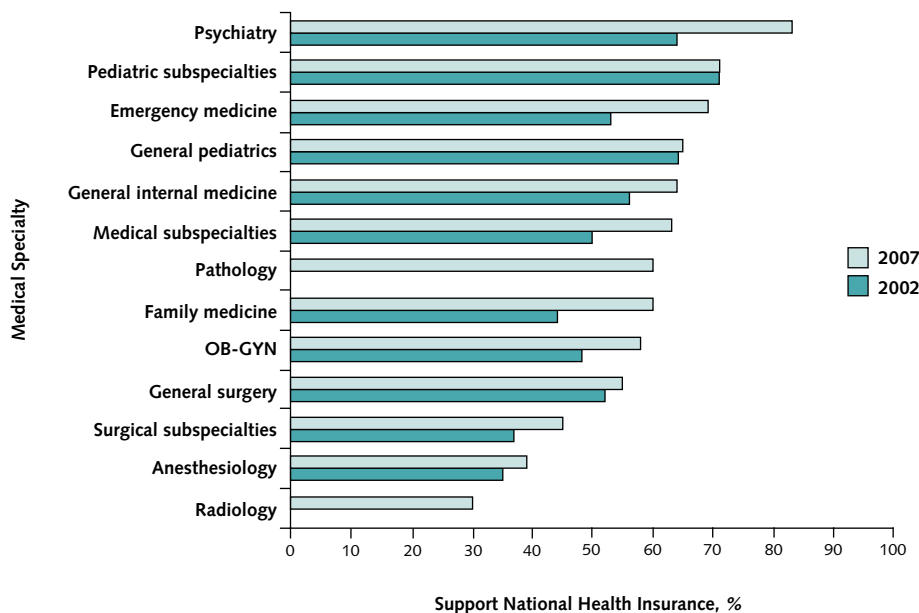
Results: Of 5000 mailed surveys, 509 were returned as undeliverable and 197 were returned by physicians who were no longer practicing. We received 2193 surveys from the 4294 eligible participants, for a response rate of 51%. Respondents did not differ significantly from nonrespondents in sex, age, doctoral degree type, or specialty. A total of 59% supported legislation to establish national health insurance (28% "strongly" and 31% "generally" supported), 9% were neutral on the topic, and 32% opposed it (17% "strongly" and 15% "generally" opposed). A total of 55% supported achieving universal coverage through more incremental reform (14% "strongly" and 41% "generally" supported), 21% were neutral on the topic, and 25% opposed incremental reform (14% "strongly" and 10% "generally" opposed). A total of 14% of physicians were opposed to national health insurance but supported more incremental reforms. More than one half of the respondents from every medical specialty supported national health insurance legislation, with the exception of respondents in surgical subspecialties, anesthesiologists, and radiologists. Current overall support (59%) increased by 10 percentage points since 2002 (49%). Support increased in every subspecialty since 2002, with the exception of pediatric subspecialists, who were highly supportive in both surveys (Figure).

Conclusion: Most physicians in the United States support government legislation to establish national health insurance. Support is high among physicians in all but some of the procedural specialties.

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Figure. Support for government legislation to establish National Health Insurance in 2007 and 2002, by specialty.



References

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2002 data are not available for pathology and radiology because of lack of response in those categories. OB-GYN = obstetrics and gynecology.