

Ideas Exchange | The Looming Sequester

Sequestration threatens Medical College's research and education

By John R. Raymond Sr., Joseph E. Kerschner And Glenn Allen Bolton Jr.
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They are one in a billion: a 4-year old girl from Pewaukee is the first person on Earth with Pompe disease to survive longer than a few months. Jeanna Giese defeats rabies. DNA sequencing is used for the first time to identify and treat a little boy's unknown disease.

These three remarkable stories that occurred at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin could not be told without the pioneering research and education taking place at the Medical College of Wisconsin

However, sequestration threatens our ability to create those stories. If federal sequestration takes effect as expected at midnight Friday, the cuts will disproportionately affect medical schools, teaching hospitals and the patients they serve.

Leaders, faculty and staff at the Medical College of Wisconsin and our affiliated hospitals understand the importance of making difficult economic decisions and the need to bring value to our communities, and we work diligently every day to make these tough choices as we strive to enhance our efficiency and quality. These efforts were recognized this week as Froedtert and The Medical College of Wisconsin was named one of the top 15 major teaching hospitals in the nation by Truven Health Analytics, which uses a methodology to rank over 3,000 hospitals based on cost, quality and service.

It is the indiscriminate nature of sequestration and the disproportionate impact on academic health centers that is most troubling. Many patients have illnesses or injuries that require the more sophisticated level of technology and expertise only available at a teaching hospital. Those patients, such as victims of car accidents and gun violence, know how important it is to have a teaching hospital with a state-of-the art trauma center and expert physicians ready to provide critical care.

Teaching hospitals such as our clinical partners at Froedtert already face a broad range of

reimbursement cuts from health care reform. Further cuts, which will occur with sequestration's 2% cut in Medicare reimbursement, will mean less money to support critical patient care services.

We are also facing a physician shortage in Wisconsin; it is estimated we will need 100 new doctors per year for the next 20 years, particularly in primary care, and in rural and underserved regions of our state. There has been discussion in Washington of cutting federal support for physician training to reduce the deficit; this would exacerbate our looming shortage, and make it difficult for patients to get crucial medical appointments.

Sequestration also will hurt patients by cutting vital federal funding for medical research. We estimate grant reductions of \$5 million to \$9 million per year from existing grants and reduced awards in the future. Indiscriminate cutting of research support is likely to have long-term effects on health care discovery; it will affect medical progress across all disciplines of research, investigating the full spectrum of diseases and conditions. It also will directly affect our ability to train the next generation of medical researchers.

In short, sequestration will adversely affect our ability to fulfill our missions: to be a national leader in the education and development of the next generation of physicians and scientists; to discover and translate new knowledge in the biomedical sciences; to provide cutting-edge, interdisciplinary and compassionate clinical care of the highest quality; and to improve the health of the communities we serve.

The Medical College of Wisconsin is committed to doing its part to slow the growth of health care spending by developing new models of care, disseminating best practices and ensuring that future physicians are educated in these new practices. Across-the-board cuts are not the answer.

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