

# Syllabus

## ***Course Title and Number***

PUAF 735

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## ***Course Objectives***

- Provide a broad overview of the US health care system today, including Medicare, Medicaid, S-CHIP, as well as employer-based health benefits and the health insurance system.
- Highlight the main strengths and weaknesses of our health care system; where does the U.S. excel, and what are the key gaps and deficiencies in our system?
- Explain the leading health reform proposals now under consideration in Congress and what they might mean for health care in the U.S.
- Offer a detailed understanding of the fundamental forces driving up health care spending, causing patient safety problems and inappropriate medical care, and contributing to the large number of uninsured people and health care access problems.
- Understand the role of new medical technology, population aging, behavior and lifestyle, public health challenges, the medical liability system, personal expectations about health care, and moral/ethical considerations in driving up health costs.
- Help students develop their own informed ideas about how to improve the US health care system.
- Help students develop research and leadership skills in public policy issues related to health care.

## Readings

This course will use a series of chapters from important books published in recent years, key journal articles, websites, and other research materials to provide students with important background information about the US health care system.

- OECD. *Health at a Glance: 2007: OECD Indicators*. pp. 86-97.
- U.S. Congressional Budget Office. “The Long-Term Budget Outlook: Federal Debt Held by the Public Under CBO’s Two Budget Scenarios. Summary and pages 1-35.
- Lisa Clemens-Cope, Stephen Zuckerman and Roberton Williams. “Changes to the Tax Exclusion of Employer-Sponsored Health Insurance Premiums: A Potential Source of Financing for Health Reform.” Urban Institute. June 2009.
- John Holahan. Hearing on Health Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Proposals to Reform the Health System. Testimony before the Committee on Ways and Means, United States House of Representatives. June 24, 2009.
- Joseph Antos. “The Case for Real Health Reform.” American Enterprise Institute. AEI Working Paper #148, June 23, 2009.
- Robert A. Berenson. Hearing on Health Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reforming the Health Care Delivery System. Testimony before the Committee on Ways and Means, United States House of Representatives, April 1, 2009.
- Jonathan Gruber. “Universal Health Insurance Coverage or Economic Relief—A False Choice.” *New England Journal of Medicine*. January 29, 2009.
- Micah Hartman et al. “National Health Spending In 2007: Slower Drug Spending Contributes To Lowest Rate of Overall Growth Since 1998.” *Health Affairs*. January/February 2009. Vol. 28, No. 1. pp. 246-261.
- Paul Ginsburg. “Don’t Break Out the Champagne: Continued Slowing of Health Care Spending Growth Unlikely To Last.” *Health Affairs*. January/February 2008. Vol. 27, No. 1. pp. 30-32.
- Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured. “Low-Income Adults Under Age 65—Many are Poor, Sick, and Uninsured.” June 2009.
- Kaiser Family Foundation. “Health Care Costs, A Primer: Key Information on Health Care Costs and Their Impact. March 2009.
- Michael E. Chernew, Richard A. Hirth, and David M. Cutler. “Increased Spending on Health Care: How Much Can the United States Afford?” *Health Affairs*. Vol. 22, No. 4. July/August 2003. pp. 15-29.
- Gerard Anderson et. al. “Chronic Conditions: Making the Case for Ongoing Care.” September 2004. Johns Hopkins University, Partnership for Solutions.
- Schoen C, et al. “In Chronic Condition: Experiences Of Patients With Complex Health Care Needs, In Eight Countries, 2008. *Health Affairs: Web Exclusives*. Volume 28, Nos. 1-2. 2009. pp. w1-w16.
- David M. Cutler. “Introduction: Crisis by Design” and Chapter One: “The Health of the Nation: A History,” *Your Money or Your Life: Strong Medicine for America’s Health Care System*. Oxford University Press. 2004. Introductory un-numbered page plus pp. x-xiv and pp. 1-9.

- Donald M. Berwick. *Escape Fire: Lessons for the Future of Health Care*. The Commonwealth Fund. 2002. pp. 3-56.
- Robert E. Mechanic and Stuart H. Altman. “Payment Reform Options: Episode Payment Is A Good Place To Start.” *Health Affairs: Value in Health Care*. Volume 28: Supplement 1. 2009. W262-w271.
- Elliot Fisher, David Goodman, Jonathan Skinner, and Kristen Bronner. “Health Care Spending, Quality, and Outcomes: More Isn’t Always Better.” The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. February 27, 2009.
- Elizabeth McGlynn et. al. “The Quality of Health Care Delivered to Adults in the United States.” *New England Journal of Medicine*. Vol. 348:2635-2645. June 26, 2003. No. 26.

### **Grading and Required Submissions**

Students will be responsible for submitting one paper and one in-class presentation that involve research on a particular current problem in our health care system and policy options for addressing this problem. The paper will be about 10 pages with an Executive Summary. During Class Sessions 10 and 11, each student will make a five-minute presentation of the highlights of the paper in class. This will be done in a way similar to presenting a summary of your research and policy implications at a conference, and presenters will respond to questions and suggestions from other students. Presenters will try to work valuable comments into the final version of their papers.

Each student will also present a five-minute summary of one of the readings at the start of one class, summarizing the key points of the article.

There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam.

The paper will account for 30 percent of the grade and the presentation of the paper will account for 10 percent of the grade. The mid-term exam will comprise 20 percent. The final exam will account for 40 percent of the grade.

### **Sources of Information**

The following websites could provide useful information:

#### **Websites**

Kaiser Family Foundation [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)

The Commonwealth Fund [www.cmwf.org](http://www.cmwf.org)

The Urban Institute [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

Brookings Institution [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

American Enterprise Institute [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)

RAND [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org)

Dartmouth Atlas Project [www.dartmouthatlas.org](http://www.dartmouthatlas.org)  
Institute for Healthcare Improvement [www.ihl.org](http://www.ihl.org)  
National Quality Forum [www.qualityforum.org](http://www.qualityforum.org)

In addition, the following government websites and international organizations could be helpful.

*Federal/Congressional*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)  
Centers on Medicare and Medicaid Services [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov)  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
National Center for Healthcare Statistics [www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs)  
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)  
Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. [www.medpac.gov](http://www.medpac.gov)  
Health Resources and Services Administration [www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov)  
Food and Drug Administration [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)  
U.S. Congressional Budget Office [www.cbo.gov](http://www.cbo.gov)  
Library of Congress (Thomson service)  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation [www.aspe.hhs.gov](http://www.aspe.hhs.gov)  
U.S. Government Accountability Office [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

*State:*

Maryland Dept. of Health and Hygiene [www.dhnh.state.md.us](http://www.dhnh.state.md.us)  
Maryland Health Services Cost and Review Commission [www.hscrc.state.md.us](http://www.hscrc.state.md.us)

*International:*

World Health Organization [www.who.int/en](http://www.who.int/en)  
World Bank [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)  
Organisation for Economic and Cooperation and Development [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

## **Weekly Outline**

### **Session 1**

The first course session will involve acquainting the students with key basic facts about the U.S. health care system. This session will provide an overview of the three key problems facing the US health care system: sharply rising costs, problems of quality of care and patient safety, and the large number of Americans who have no health insurance, as well as barriers to access to health services facing various populations. We will begin with a brief history of how our present system evolved. This will be followed by an overview of how our system is financed: the role of Medicare and Medicaid, the State

Children's Health Insurance Program, the role of employers in providing coverage to their workers, the people who buy their own health insurance, and how we finance care for the uninsured. The discussion will feature trends in these sources of financing over time, and projections into the future if no major policy changes occur.

Readings: Hartman, Ginsburg.

## **Session 2**

This session will feature a detailed presentation of the leading proposal(s) on the Congressional table in September 2009. How do these bills address the three key problems with the health care system explained in the first class? What new benefits are proposed? How much will they cost? How will the proposal be paid for? What are the respective roles for the federal government, the states, and the private sector under reform proposals?

Reading: Holahan; Antos; Gruber

## **Session 3**

This session will compare health care spending and health indicators across various countries. It will objectively examine how foreign health care systems work and will compare the US to other countries. The session will explain how other countries achieve cost control and provide universal coverage. The advantages, challenges, and tradeoffs involved in national health systems will be explored.

Reading: Schoen; OECD, pp. 86-97.

## **Session 4**

This session will focus on people who have no health insurance. What are their characteristics? How much health care do they get, and how is it financed? What innovations in covering the uninsured are emerging at the state and local levels?

Readings: Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, June 2009.

## **Session 5**

This session will explain the forces driving up health care spending in the U.S. Students will learn about the costs and benefits of new medical technology and the importance of appropriately applying this technology, population aging, government tax, spending, and regulatory policies that affect spending levels, the importance of behavior and lifestyle, and the medical liability system.

Readings: Cutler; Clemens-Cope; Kaiser Family Foundation

### **Session 6**

This class provides in-depth knowledge about the challenges in improving quality of health care and patient safety. Students will learn about the nature and extent of inappropriate medical care and patient safety problems. This includes medical practice variations in which higher spending in some regions of the country is not associated with better health outcomes.

Readings: McGlynn; Fisher et al.; Berwick

### **Session 7**

**Mid-term exam given**

### **Session 8**

This class discussion will focus on how payment system reforms and a more modern health information system can drive improvements in quality and patient safety. What are some major options for payment reform, such as “bundling” of services, pay for performance, “capitation” payments?

Readings: Berenson, Mechanic and Altman

### **Session 9**

The critical importance of chronic care management and disease management in an aging society will be presented. Students will learn about the dimensions of the problem and promising models such as team-based care and interventions to reduce hospital readmissions, ER use, and infections. What new approaches to managing and paying for chronic care are emerging?

Reading: Anderson

### **Session 10**

Presentations of paper topics by students with class discussion

### **Session 11**

Presentations of paper topics by students with class discussion

## **Session 12**

This session will feature a presentation of key health indicators for the US population, including trends in obesity, smoking, and such chronic illnesses as diabetes and asthma. The discussion will focus on ways to improve preventive medical care and highlight the “social determinants” of good health. How can our public health system be structured and supported to address these challenges?

## **Session 13**

The Future of Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP: The challenge of addressing the fact that the Medicare program is actuarially unsound; options for making the program sustainable will be presented and assessed. These include raising the age of eligibility, asking higher-income beneficiaries to pay higher premiums than they do today, raising payroll taxes, pegging Medicare payments to the cost of “accountable health organizations,” and changing the way Medicare purchases health services. Proposals for controlling Medicaid spending and improving the performance of the program will be explored.

Reading: U.S. Congressional Budget Office: Summary and pp 1-35; Chernew

## **Session 14**

The role of ethics, expectations, and the medical malpractice system in an aging society will be discussed. With continuous breakthroughs in research and technology—who gets what, and who decides? Is care “rationed” today, and how does that occur? Do we need to set some limits on who gets what care, and under what conditions? How could that be accomplished?