

Testimony of Christopher Stroud, MD

Wisconsin Legislative Council Special Committee on Health Care Access

**Isaac Coggs Heritage Health Center
8200 West Silver Spring Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53218
Friday, October 22, 2010**

Chairperson Representative Fred Kessler, Vice Chair Senator Luther Olsen and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide my clinical and administrative perspective on Wisconsin's health care provider shortage. My name is Dr. Chris Stroud. I am a Board Certified obstetrician gynecologist, who joined Aurora in 2008 as the Vice President of Medical Services and Chief Medical Officer with Aurora Medical Group.

Aurora Health Care, a not-for-profit integrated delivery system based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, serves 100 rural and urban communities across the eastern third of the State of Wisconsin through fourteen hospitals, a physician practice comprising of 1,300 physicians, over 150 clinics, 83 pharmacies, Wisconsin's largest home health organization, and one of the state's largest intern and resident programs. As the state's largest provider, Aurora's health care network includes the only remaining downtown Milwaukee hospital, Aurora Sinai Medical Center.

Aurora University of Wisconsin Medical Group

In May of 2010, I also assumed responsibility for the Aurora University of Wisconsin Medical Group (AUWMG), the academic arm of Aurora Health Care. AUWMG administers graduate medical education residency training programs to 150 residents and fellows each year in Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Radiology, as well as fellowship training in Cardiology, Gastroenterology, and Geriatrics. In addition, AUWMG provides clinical teaching for several hundred medical students during their 3rd and 4th years of medical school. This includes nearly 300 students from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, and over 100 students from the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Of particular importance is Aurora Health Care's participation in 2 unique programs with UWSMPH focused on addressing the health care needs of two special patient populations: those living in rural and urban underserved communities.

The first of these is The Wisconsin Academy of Rural Medicine (WARM). WARM is a special admissions and curricular track of the medical school whose goals is to select students from rural Wisconsin that are committed to returning to rural areas to practice after their training. The school will eventually have 25 students a year in this program. In similar programs in other states, programs like WARM have significantly impacted the numbers of practicing rural physicians. Aurora Health Care is pleased to be one of the three sites where medical students will spend their clinical years, living and learning, in rural communities, and mastering those special competencies and skills necessary to be successful providers in rural settings.

The second initiative, which Aurora supports in partnership with the UWSMPH, is the Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health (TRIUMPH) program. Now in its 3rd year, TRIUMPH medical students come to Milwaukee during their 3rd and 4th years and focus on caring for patients in urban, underserved communities. This special group of students is committed to providing health care to these diverse, often underserved populations after they complete their medical school training. Through this program students master those focused skills and competencies necessary to be successful providers in urban underserved communities.

In the Aurora UW Medical Group (AUWMG) and in Aurora Medical Group Milwaukee outpatient clinics, our care teams have been able to develop innovative care models that have expanded access for the urban community, that have improved quality outcomes as defined by Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality (WCHQ) and CMS-Premier, and in so doing we have significantly reduced cost of care.

Aurora UW clinics at Walker's Point (non-insured patients), Clarke Square (clinic within shopping center on Milwaukee's south side run by Nurse Practitioners), and the Salvation Army homeless shelter aligned with Aurora Sinai hospital, have been supported by Aurora Health Care's significant investment in population health and continued support of the development of innovative community-based models of health care delivery.

Recommendations

Expand Primary Care Workforce: Aurora supports increasing the percentage of the physician workforce that is dedicated to providing primary care. Multiple studies, nationally and internationally, support that as the percentage of primary care providers increases in a population, health outcomes improve and costs are lowered.

The State of Wisconsin should focus on efforts that:

- Expand residency programs that produce primary care graduates.
- Expand programs that provide tuition assistance and meaningful student loan forgiveness for graduates who practice in primary care and/or graduates who practice in a rural/underserved area (primary and non-primary care). We must recognize that practicing medicine in rural and urban underserved areas presents unique challenges to young physicians and we must offer assistance in meeting those challenges.
- Advocate to the Center of Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) to increase the number of primary care residency training slots, not just increase the total number of funded slots:
 - In the past when absolute numbers have been increased, those new slots translated into new specialty training positions (that is, non-primary care).
 - Currently specific to internal medicine, approximately 85% of internal medicine residency graduates go on to fellowship training and not primary care. Therefore, increasing the total number of internal medicine training slots will likely not translate into greater numbers of primary care physicians.
- We should focus on efforts that modify reimbursement systems in ways that make primary care more attractive for graduates as well as changes that properly reward primary care physicians for working with advanced practice providers such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

Expand Support for WARM and TRIUMPH: Aurora supports continued and increased support for programs like WARM and TRIUMPH that select students into medical school based on an increased likelihood of pursuing careers in primary care, particularly in rural and underserved urban areas.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify. Aurora looks forward to continuing to partner with the state and many interested parties to insure that Wisconsin has the necessary health care workforce to meet the growing health care needs of the state's population.