

NURSES, FUTURE DOCTOR PUSH FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM POLITICS | MEETINGS ACROSS STATE WILL FOCUS ON FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR SYSTEM

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NOBLE — The group Oklahomans for Healthcare Reform asked the public for their concerns about receiving and paying for health care, and Sonya Hill, a full-time nurse taking on full-time graduate study, fired one of the first salvos.

“I have a 13-year-old son with sickle-cell anemia, and insurance companies refuse to insure him because they say he has a pre-existing condition,” she said.

Brenda Head, a nurse at Oklahoma Heart Hospital, said insurance companies too often dictate how long patients can stay in hospitals and won't pay for critical outpatient services.

And Ryan Knapp, a pediatric intern at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, blamed pharmaceutical companies for driving up health care costs through increased spending on advertising and wooing of physicians.

“We can provide brilliant diagnoses and excellent care, but if our patients can't (afford) the \$200 medicine, what good is it?” he asked.

They and others spoke at a town hall meeting Thursday night at The Truth Church in Noble. It was the first of a series of meetings Oklahomans for Healthcare Reform expects to conduct this year across the state.

Moderator Dr. Rene McNall, a pediatric oncologist at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, said the organization will gather comments from the meetings and use the information to develop ideas for legislation.

Panelists were Republican Rep. Scott Martin of Norman; Democratic Reps. Wallace Collins of Norman, Joe Dorman of Rush Springs and Eric Proctor of Tulsa; and Democratic Sens. Kenneth Corn of Poteau and John Sparks of Norman.

Most comments and complaints dealt with insurance coverage, costs and denials, though some by Knapp and others addressed different health care topics.

McNall said prohibiting physicians from owning specialty clinics that could boost profits by ordering unnecessary tests and scans would be another way to lower costs.

Dorman urged physicians and nurses to be more diligent in policing themselves.

“Today, we only dealt with insurance, but we need to kick out the bad actors,” Dorman said of physicians who are cited multiple times.

“It will lower insurance rates because there would be fewer lawsuits, and it would encourage more doctors and nurses to stay in Oklahoma because we'd have a better reputation.”



State Sens. John Sparks, D-Norman, left, and Kenneth Corn, D-Poteau, were panelists at a town hall meeting Thursday in Noble that was organized by Oklahomans for Healthcare Reform. The group aims to make health care more accessible and affordable in Oklahoma. PHOTO BY JACONNA AGUIRRE, THE OKLAHOMAN



Ryan Knapp, a pediatric intern from Nichols Hills, shows some frustration during the meeting. PHOTO BY JACONNA AGUIRRE, THE OKLAHOMAN