Health Policy & a Pint

By the Health Care for All Campaign

American Medical Student Association

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Could immigration reform improve our health?

By Matthew O'Brien, MD, MSc Published: March 19, 2013

The Breakdown:

This article discusses the need for including undocumented Americans in the Affordable Care Act. Dr. O'Brien primarily relies on a cost benefit analysis to demonstrate how guaranteeing undocumented Americans health insurance would have minimal adverse effects on tax payers' burden. Rather, Dr. O'Brien asserts that undocumented Americans—which comprise one-quarter of the nation's immigrant population—generally have a better health status than their citizen counterparts. He proves this point by largely extracting data from studies done on Latino immigrants in the United States. Using this research data, Dr. O'Brien declares that the insurance pool would actually benefit from the inclusion of undocumented Americans.

Another Round Discussion Questions:

- 1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing a cost benefit analysis to advocate for extending health care insurance to marginalized populations, such as undocumented Americans?
- 2. What role can physicians play in advocating for marginalized patient populations, such as undocumented Americans?
- 3. Is medical education currently doing enough to prepare physicians in becoming effective advocates for their patients? Why or why not?

Recommended Reading:

Berk, M., Schur, C., Chavez, L., & Frankel, M. (2000). Health care use among undocumented latino immigrants. *Health Affairs*, *19*(4), 51-64. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.19.4.51.

- Lara, M., Gamboa, C., Kahramanian, M., Morales, L., & Bautista, D. (2012). Acculturation and latino health in the united states. In T. La Veist & L. Isaac (Eds.), *Race, Ethnicity, and Health: A Public Health Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 215-251). Somerset, NJ: Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated.
- Ortega, A., Fang, H., Perez, V., Rizzo, J., Carter-Pokras, O., Wallace, S., & Gelberg, L. (2007). Health care access, use of services, and experiences among undocumented mexicans and other latinos. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, *167*(21), 2354-60. doi: 10.1001/archinte167.21.23 54.
- Zuckerman, S., Waidmann, T., & Lawton, E. (2011). Undocumented immigrants, left out of health reform, likely to continue to grow as share of the uninsured. *Health Affairs*, *30* (10), 1997-2004. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2011.0604.