

This article continues a discussion of the reasons for the high cost of our health care system. As I mentioned at the conclusion of last week's article, some of the cost is due to the huge administrative burden of managed care. Doctors and hospitals have to hire attorneys to review the complex managed care contracts. They have to have trained employees who can make sure they are in compliance with all of the different rules that each managed care company implements. As a result, a significant portion of each dollar that a patient or insurance company pays to a doctor or hospital, is used to pay these costs.

While managed care was originally developed to slow the increase in health care cost, it has ended up doing the opposite. Both doctors and patients are hurt by the current system, while the managed care companies themselves reap the rewards.

Another contributor to the high cost of health care is the use of unnecessary or ineffective treatments. This is a much larger problem than most people realize.

One of the causes of this behavior is the fear of being sued. Many doctors recommend expensive diagnostic procedures using expensive technology to protect themselves. Often, a skilled doctor can diagnose a disease just by taking a good history and performing some simple, inexpensive tests. If however, the diagnosis is incorrect and the failure to arrive at an accurate diagnosis ended up harming the patient, the doctor can be sued for malpractice. In court, negligence can be established if the doctor failed to do what most of his colleagues would have done in a similar situation.

In other words, if most doctors order expensive tests, even though most of the time they are unnecessary, then all doctors are held to the same standard. The solution to this problem is on the horizon. There is a push across the spectrum of the health care delivery system to develop evidence based guidelines. These guidelines are developed by groups of doctors and researchers who look at the available scientific evidence and develop recommendations for how to diagnose and treat various conditions.

Hopefully in the future, doctors will not be held to a standard of what other doctors would do. Rather they will be held to a standard supported by the scientific evidence.

I have been working on such a panel for several years now developing guidelines for the chiropractic profession. If you want to look at what we have produced visit ccgpp.org. Next week I will continue this discussion.