

Nurses' guide to single-payer reform

Sen. Tolman and Rep. Hynes honored at annual Dr. Benjamin Gill awards

The Seventh Annual Dr. Benjamin F. Gill Memorial Award Reception held March 19 at the Hotel Radisson in Cambridge honored Sen. Steven A. Tolman and Rep. Frank M. Hynes for their work and continued efforts in fighting for a single payer health care system in Massachusetts.

As the debate over how to expand health insurance coverage in Massachusetts intensifies, activists from across the commonwealth who are engaged in the fight for fundamental health care reform gathered in Cambridge to honor the memory of the late Dr. Ben Gill. Gill was a psychiatrist who devoted his retirement years to making universal health care a reality. The award recognizes a person or persons who have made a significant contribution to the cause in which Dr. Gill believed so passionately.

The recipients this year were two outstanding legislators and the lead sponsors of the *Massachusetts Health Care Trust* legislation, Sen. Steve Tolman and Rep. Frank Hynes. Quentin Young, coordinator of Physicians for a National Health Program, traveled from Chicago to deliver the keynote address.

The Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care (MASS-CARE) and the Universal Health Care Education Fund (UHCEF) jointly sponsored the event. MASS-CARE is a coalition of over eighty local and statewide organizations, including MNA, that have united to press for passage of the *Massachusetts Health Care Trust* bill, legislation to create a universal, single-payer healthcare system for Massachusetts. UHCEF is MASS-CARE's nonprofit [501c(3)] partner, educating Massachusetts' residents about the unjust underpinnings and practice of the current system.

Barbara Ackermann, chair of UHCEF and former mayor of Cambridge, emceed the proceedings. During the event, the Joseph Lillyman Ensemble, whose members belong to the Consortium for Psychotherapy in Concord, entertained guests. Regrettably, Peg O'Malley, RN, MASS-CARE's chair, was under the weather and unable to participate.

Receiving the award on behalf of Rep. Hynes (the lead sponsor of the legislation in the House) was his legislative aide, Lincoln Heineman. Due to a long-standing prior engagement, Representative Hynes was unable to attend.

Honoring Frank Hynes underscored the intricate relationship between the integrity of the nursing profession and the building of a just healthcare system. In 2000, Rep. Hynes co-chaired the state commission studying the crisis in the nursing profession which recommended mandatory, minimum RN-to-patient ratios. Several years ago MNA created the Frank M. Hynes Award to recognize the contributions of deserving Massachusetts freshman state legislators or municipal officials who clearly demonstrate exceptional contributions to nursing and health care.

Sen. Dianne Wilkerson presented the award to her colleague and friend Steve Tolman, the bill's lead sponsor in the Senate. Wilkerson spoke eloquently of Tolman's indefatigable efforts to educate and build support among Republicans as well as Democrats, among representatives as well as senators.

Tolman extolled Wilkerson's tireless efforts on behalf of her constituents and all Massachusetts' residents, and spoke passionately of Frank Hynes' integrity and knowledge. He also urged the crowd of activists to fulfill their mission and help get the Health Care Trust passed in 2005.

Dr. Quentin Young, a 40-year advocacy veteran in his quest for national health care, brought humor and compassion to the podium. He agreed with MASS-CARE that the current political climate within the DC Beltway does not bode well for passage of legislation by Congress to begin the transition to single-payer universal health care. Instead, he said, it will begin in the states and prove that a single risk pool is cost-effective and quality-enhancing. The motto of the campaign is, "Everyone in, nobody out."

As Young put it, "The first part of this slogan describes the legal structure of single payer, while the second part is its ethical imperative." With the Vermont Legislature poised to enact single payer enabling legislation, the race is on to see which state will be the first to launch a high-quality, universal, portable, publicly financed, democratically accountable system.

Dr. Patricia Downs Berger reported that MASS-CARE's Legislative Committee has

prepared a petition for grass roots supporters to use as they build political pressure on legislators to support change. A sample petition is part of this article. Other copies of the petition and information on how best to use it can be obtained from the MASS-CARE office and will soon be available on its Web site, www.masscare.org. ■



Sens. Dianne Wilkerson and Steven Tolman



Dr. Quentin Young

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Single Payer Petition (sample copy)

The Undersigned Citizens of the Commonwealth Desire the Passage Into Law of A Single Payer System of Health Care

This single payer system will make affordable, high quality, comprehensive health care available to everyone because it will eliminate the huge administrative waste characteristic of multi-payer and for-profit systems. The Trust will be funded with federal and state money, as well as with individual, family, and employer premiums collected by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. There will be no co-pays, deductibles, health insurance premiums, or other out-of-pocket expenses. The Trust will control the system's overall cost with efficient administration.

Therefore it will mean:

- high quality health care for Massachusetts residents;
- health care as a right, not as a shrinking, job-dependent benefit;
- facilitating preventive care, early diagnosis, and treatment for all;
- eliminating overuse of expensive emergency care now used by the uninsured and underinsured who delay seeking treatment for financial reasons;
- freedom to choose one's own doctor;
- money spent on patient care instead of on excess profits and paperwork.

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