

**Health Care Issues for Seniors:  
Current Problems  
Prospective Solutions**

**Roger P Bermingham MD  
Family Practice Residency  
Poudre Valley Hospital**



## Goals for talk: Senior Health Care Issues

- **Outline problems with health care access for seniors**
- **Review why some senior health care issues seldom addressed**
- **Look at fragmentation of senior health care**
- **Brainstorm some partial solutions with health care**



# Who provides health care for seniors?

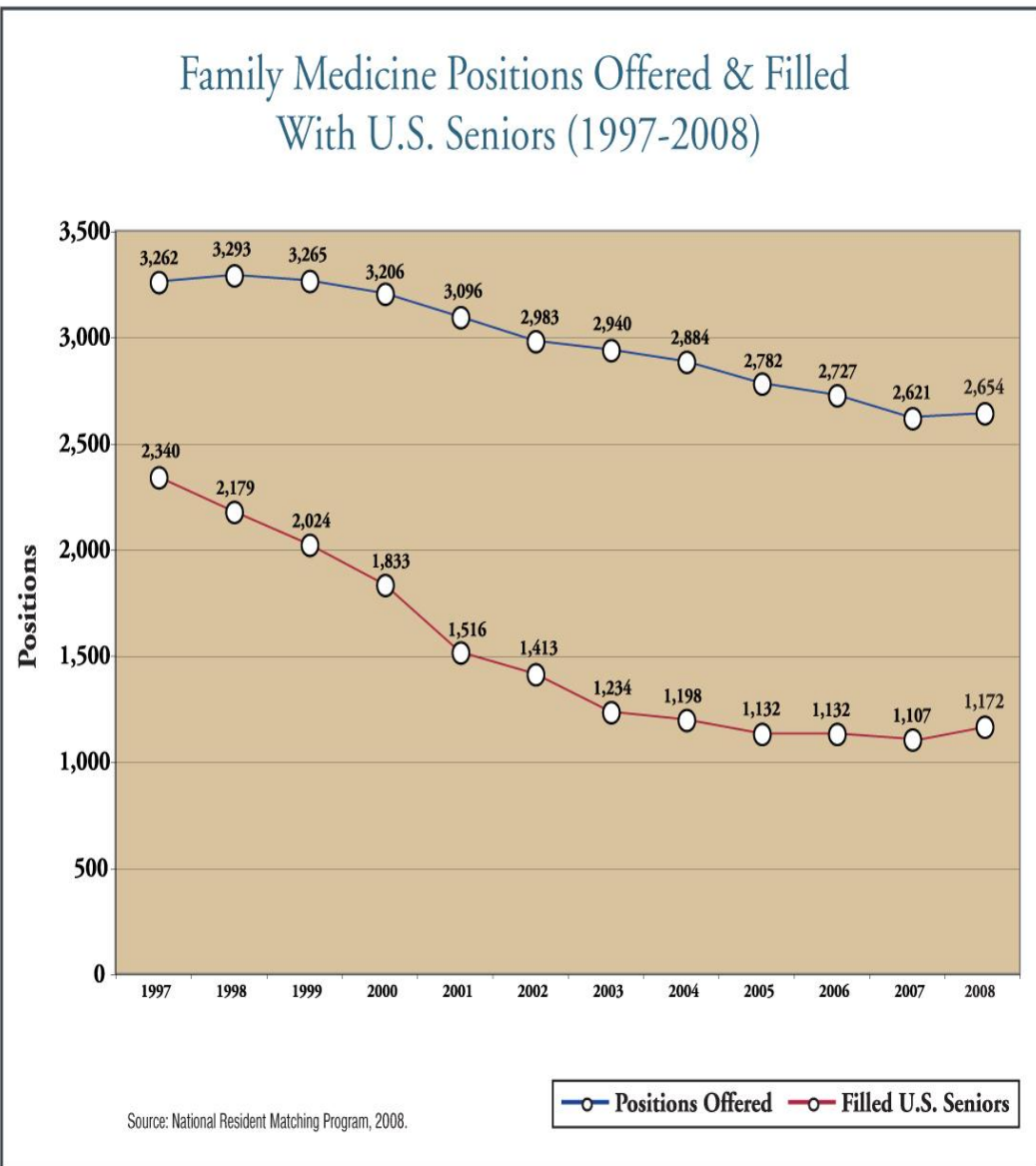
- Primary Care
  - General Internists?
  - Family Physicians?
  - Geriatricians?
  - Nurse Practitioners?
- Specialty Care
  - Ophthalmology, Cardiology, Orthopedics, etc
  - Often dependant on insurance
- Alternative Care
  - Almost never covered by insurance



# Shortage of Primary Care Providers

- General Internists
  - 2% of graduating medical school seniors plan to go into general internal medicine: 2007 data
- Family Physicians
  - Currently are 12% of the work physician work force
  - Only provide a percentage of senior care
  - Declining number of US graduates going into FP residencies





# What about Geriatrics

- In 2007, 91 graduates from US medical schools entered Geriatric Fellowships
  - Most are destined for academic medicine
  - Added training with a decreased reimbursement
- Number of practicing geriatricians declined 5.5% from 2000 to 2007



# Nurse Practitioners

- Often offered as a potential solution
- Little data on what percent of NPs go into a practice that services ambulatory seniors
- NP's face the same reimbursement issues as physicians regarding Medicare
  - What percent of Medicare is an upper limit for a general office? MGMA suggests less than 8%



# If you get into see the doctor...

- Will you have enough time to bring up the issues you need to?
  - Average primary care office visit time is shrinking
  - Longer appointment times less available
- With shorter appointment times
  - Patients do not bring up all the issues that are bothering them
  - Providers do not verbally screen for other illnesses (see next slide)



# Many seniors don't report problems

- Hidden Illness of Seniors (Ham, 2002)
  - Depression
  - Incontinence
  - Musculoskeletal stiffness/Falling
  - Osteoporosis
  - Hearing Loss
  - Memory Loss
  - Dental/Nutritional problems
  - Sexual problems
  - Alcohol concerns



# Specialist issues related to seniors

- Often able to access better than primary care
- More costly to the health care system
- Most specialists do not have training dealing with specific geriatric issues
  - Often patients end up with inappropriate drugs
  - Patients who end up seeing primarily multiple specialists are at risk for “polypharmacy”
  - Fragmentation of senior care



# Are there solutions for the impending Senior Health Care crisis?

- There is likely not a single solution
- Each potential solution has significant hurdles and drawbacks
- Many of the solutions take time to develop
- We are definitely in a “brainstorming permitted” mode



# Some existing solutions

- Medicare plus Choice plans
  - Offer benefits above Medicare basics often including drugs
  - Often regionally limited (Kaiser, Rocky Mtn HMO)
  - May have cut backs in arenas that aren't evident
- Program for All-inclusive Care of the Elderly
  - Basically is Day Care plus medical services
  - Primarily for frail elderly with Medicaid
  - Has to be regionally approved



# Some options under discussion

- The Patient Centered Medical Home
  - Having access to multiple modalities of care through or at your primary care physician's office
  - Works only for larger medical groups
  - No current extra funding—but hoped for.
- NP clinics targeted for Seniors
  - Typically work better in larger cities with higher number of Medicare HMO plans
  - Still often need physician oversight



# Brainstorming/Other options

- Retraining physicians in geriatric care
  - Donald Reynolds Foundation grants
  - Great education but reimbursement/access issues remain
- Using Trained Lay persons to act as Case finders
- Increased loan forgiveness for physicians working in clinics with a higher percentage of senior patients



# Creating a joint future

- What brainstorming ideas does the community have?
- Who is ready to become political activists for senior health care?

