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HHS to Spend \$ 1 Billion for Partnership to Prevent Medical Mistakes

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As part of the Affordable Care Act, the Department of Health and Human Services will spend \$1 billion to support a new partnership aimed at improving safety in health care and reducing health care spending.

The agency says its new Partnership for Patients will aim to cut down on medical mistakes and preventable injuries and infections, leading to greater savings in the long run. Health and Human Services projects the program would lead to \$50 billion in Medicare [1] savings over the next ten years.

"Too many Americans are being harmed by the care that is supposed to help them," says Dr. Donald Berwick [2], the department's Medicare [1] chief and the HHS point person overseeing the partnership. "This doesn't just produce anguish and tragedies for families and patients, it wastes over \$4 billion of Medicare [1] money every year."

HHS says more than 500 hospitals have already signed on to be a part of the partnership that focuses on teamwork instead of blame to cut down on medical mistakes and make patient care safer. Advocates say Medicare will be a key to the partnership's success.

"Medicare has a special role to play," Sebelius said. "As a source of health insurance for more than 45 million Americans, Medicare has a deep responsibility to help improve the quality of care. And as the country's largest payer for care, Medicare has the powerful ability to be a catalyst for change."

But the plan's parameters could be in jeopardy going forward. House Republicans have introduced a 2012 budget that would, in essence, end Medicare, and earlier this year, voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

And some critics say the partnership initiative further proves the Affordable Care Act was bad medicine.

"The best estimates suggest that the number of Americans who die from medical errors is as much as five times larger than the number who die because they lack health insurance (98,000 vs. 18,000)," says Michael Cannon, the director of health policy studies at the libertarian CATO Institute. "So, first, the fact that ObamaCare devotes \$1 trillion to covering the uninsured, but only one thousandth of that amount on preventing medical errors proves that ObamaCare is not about saving lives." Cannon says the federal intervention in health care has already led to more medical

mistakes and that in this case, the government is congratulating itself for working to fix a problem it created.

But HHS says the partnership's goals are to reduce preventable injuries by 40 percent and to cut preventable hospital readmissions by 20 percent within its first three years. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius [3] says meeting those goals would save Medicare \$ 10 billion during that time and another \$25 billion in the private sector. Plus, she says, the partnership could save 60,000 lives during the three years.

"This is not just about improving health. But by reducing medical errors, we're also going to bring down rising health insurance costs which have put a growing burden on families, businesses and government," Sebelius said.

Congress

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