

FIXING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM: Putting more boots on the ground.

Soon, because of health care reform, it's likely that most Americans will be covered by health insurance. But simply covering

more people won't help if health care professionals aren't available to provide that care. To increase access, we also need more health care

providers. Or as they like to say in D.C., more 'boots on the ground.'

As a traveling physician, I go to rural communities many times a month and I see the shortage of providers firsthand. Typically, I'll work 48 to 72 hours straight in places like John Day or Burns so their attending physician can take a rare weekend off.

I often hear from patients who cannot find a doctor or a nurse practitioner for themselves or their families. I know dedicated doctors who have put off retiring because they don't know how their patients will find care. Meanwhile, community hospitals spend years and go to incredible lengths just to recruit a new physician or surgeon.

At the same time, I'm heartened by OHSU students who choose to practice in Oregon's rural communities. They're making a sacrifice, as it will take them much longer to pay off loans that average more than \$150,000 per medical student. But they're also making a critical difference to our underserved communities.

Congress has taken some initial steps, but we need more support from Medicare and other sources for the educational and training programs that will create more doctors, physician assistants, nurses, nurse practitioners and dentists with a commitment to rural health care. We need to find innovative ways for students to pay back their education debts. If we achieve that, our goal of increased access will be within reach.



“Simply covering more people won't help if health care professionals aren't available to provide that care.”

Lisa Dodson, M.D.

*Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine, OHSU
Director, Oregon Area Health Education Centers (AHEC)
Oregon Family Doctor of the Year, 2009*

Ninth in a series.

Learn more and share your views at
www.ohsu.edu/withinreach

