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**THREE-FOURTHS OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT PHYSICIANS SAY NUMBER OF UNINSURED PATIENTS in ERs IS GROWING**

*New Survey of Emergency Physicians Ranks Providing Health Care to All Americans the Number One Goal for the U.S. Health Care System*

New Orleans, LA. – Seven in 10 (72 percent) emergency physicians say the number of uninsured patients they treated in the past year increased, and eight in 10 (79 percent) say it is likely to increase again during the coming year, according to the survey, released by the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), an emergency medicine specialty society, with the support of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The data was released at the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans (MCLNO), as part of *Cover the Uninsured Week*– the largest mobilization in history to promote health coverage for all Americans.

Dr. Cathi Fontenot, Medical Director of MCLNO, Dr. Larry Weiss, President of the Orleans Parish Medical Society, Dr. Cheryl Taylor, Director of Research , Southern University and A & M College of Nursing, Dr. Kevin Jordan, Emergency Room Director, Touro Infirmary, Dr. Dwayne Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of MCLNO and other health care advocates were on hand to share the results of the opinion survey of nearly 2,000 emergency doctors nationwide that showed overwhelming agreement that the uninsured patients they treat are more likely to delay care, suffer from illness and put their physical and financial health in jeopardy than are patients who have health coverage.

“I’ve been an emergency physician in New Orleans for more than twenty years. Each year, I see an increasing number of uninsured patients,” said Dr. Larry Weiss. “While we treat and stabilize them in the emergency department, after they are released, many are faced with the decision of whether to spend their money to fill a prescription, follow a recommendation to see a specialist for follow-up care or buy groceries that week. That’s a choice that no one should be forced to make.” The emergency physicians who were surveyed rated securing specialist referrals, ensuring routine follow-up care and filling prescriptions as the three most challenging tasks to coordinate for uninsured patients.

In a powerful testament to the importance of having health coverage, three out of four (74 percent) emergency physicians surveyed say their uninsured patients are more likely to die prematurely. The issue has become so critical that nearly three in five (57 percent) emergency physicians ranked providing basic health coverage to all Americans as the number one goal in improving the nation's health care system.

According to statistics released last year by the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 44 million Americans lacked health care coverage of any kind for an entire year, including 8.5 million children and over 163,000 in Louisiana. In 2002, the number of people without health coverage grew by more than 2 million – the largest one-year increase in a decade.

Additional findings from the survey include:

- Emergency physicians surveyed, on average, believe that nearly one in three (30 percent) of their patients are without health coverage.
- The surveyed physicians, on average, believe that nearly one in four of their uninsured patients are children under the age of 18.
- Four out of five (82 percent) physicians surveyed say their hospital's emergency department functions at or over capacity on a typical weekday; the share increases to 91 percent for a typical weekend.

Other research shows that ER doctors' observations are well founded. This survey comes on the heels of research from the State Health Access Data Assistance Center, located at the University of Minnesota, released last week, also for *Cover the Uninsured Week* that found:

- Uninsured adults are less likely to get the medical care they need.
- Uninsured adults are less likely to have a personal doctor or health care provider.
- Individuals who are uninsured are less likely to receive preventive services.
- Adults who are uninsured are twice as likely to report being in poor or fair health than adults who are insured.

The Institute of Medicine estimates that 18,000 adults in the U.S. die each year because they are uninsured and cannot get proper care.

“Many uninsured patients end up in the emergency department because they did not receive the preventive care they needed earlier,” said John Lumpkin, MD, MPH, an emergency physician who directs the health care

group at The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's largest health philanthropy, which is leading *Cover the Uninsured Week*. "Many uninsured patients don't have a physician they can see regularly for check-ups. Consequently they arrive in the emergency department as a last resort – frequently much sicker than they would have been if they had access to primary and preventive care."

*Cover the Uninsured Week* in New Orleans, Louisiana is being organized by a broad coalition of local organizations, including AARP Louisiana, The United Way of Greater New Orleans, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana, Agenda For Children, Southeast Coalition for Covering Kids and Families, New Orleans District Nurses Association, Orleans Parish Medical Society, Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Metropolitan Hospital Council of New Orleans, The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, Ochsner Health Plan, Louisiana Public Health Institute, EXCELth, Inc., UNO Small Business Development Center, Urban League of Greater New Orleans and the Women's Health Access Project.

Planned events to be held in New Orleans as part of *Cover the Uninsured Week*, include more than five city-wide health and enrollment fairs where men, women and children who lack coverage can receive screenings and wellness information. Uninsured individuals who are eligible for public programs will be able to enroll. Information on free or low-cost health insurance, community health centers, free clinics and pharmaceutical assistance programs will also be provided in English and Spanish at the fairs as well as through a toll-free telephone information number, 1- (888) 538-4371.

*Cover the Uninsured Week*, working with Families USA, a national health care consumer advocacy organization, developed a resource guide in English and Spanish that details what help may be available to residents of Louisiana who do not have health coverage. The guide contains information on free or low-cost health insurance programs, community health centers, free clinics and pharmaceutical assistance programs. The guide has been available at all fairs. In addition, the guide can be obtained by calling a toll-free telephone information number – 1 (888) 538-4371. The phone line works in English and Spanish. The toll-free number is funded in part by Pfizer Inc. The easy-to-understand guide, as well as information about resources for people who are uninsured, are also available on the campaign's Web site, [www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org).

In addition to The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Cover the Uninsured Week*, which occurs from May 10-16, is being organized by some of the most influential organizations in the country, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO. This non-partisan effort is being co-chaired by Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter and is endorsed by nine former U.S. Surgeons General and U.S. Secretaries of Health and Human

Services, appointed by both Republican and Democratic presidents. Noah Wyle, the star of the popular television series “ER,” is serving as the national spokesperson of the campaign.

Events in New Orleans are similar to the thousands of others being planned in communities across the United States as part of *Cover the Uninsured Week*. Complete listings of events in New Orleans and around the country, as well as detailed survey results, are available at [www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsuredWeek.org).

ACEP is a national medical specialty society representing emergency medicine with nearly 23,000 members. ACEP is committed to improving the quality of emergency care through continuing education. Headquartered in Dallas, TX, ACEP has 53 chapters representing each state, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, and a Government Services Chapter that represents emergency physicians employed by military branches and other government agencies.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is the largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care in the United States.

The survey of 1,954 members of ACEP was conducted March 15 – 25, 2004, by Public Opinion Strategies, Alexandria, VA. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 2.22%.

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