

Greenville News

Estimated printed pages: 2

April 18, 2005

Section: Opinion

Page: 6A

Health care in sharp focus

Staff

The Greenville News= Final

Riley conference may provide insights to how America may better meet the nation's health-care needs.

EDITORIAL

An impressive conference on health care at Furman University comes at an opportune moment: Health care costs are rising at an alarming rate, and many Americans who are lucky enough to be insured live in fear of losing their coverage.

The Riley Institute's 2005 National Conference on Health Policy, which takes place tonight through Wednesday, will include such topics as the overall state of American health care, minority access to health care and whether health savings accounts and other reforms may offer hope for containing costs. The conference is free and open to the public.

The keynote address also is on a subject much in the news lately: the recent controversy over Terri Schiavo, the severely brain-injured Florida woman who died recently after a long, bitter dispute between the woman's husband and parents. Discussing the topic will be Dr. Joseph Fins, chief of the division of medical ethics at Cornell University. A commentary by Fins on this issue appears today on the "Other views" page.

Tonight's address on "Diversity and Health Care Delivery and Outcomes" is by Dr. Louis Sullivan, a former top health official in the George H.W. Bush administration. Other addresses and panel discussions will concern "Health as a Human Right" and "Consumer Choice in the Age of Health Savings Accounts and the New Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit." For more details, call the Riley Institute at (864) 294-3280 or visit the Web site at www.rileyinstitute.org. The health conference follows previous and equally compelling Riley programs on national security (2003) and women in politics (2004).

This public conference is valuable at a time when health-care costs are rising far faster than inflation. An AARP study, for instance, found that since the year 2000, the wholesale prices of 153 popular drugs increased by 35.1 percent -- or 2.5 times the rate of inflation.

Meanwhile, about 43 million Americans remain uninsured in the richest nation in the world, and Americans spend far more per person on health care than anyone else in the world. Likewise, Medicare already has begun paying out more than it takes in and is set to go broke in 2020, two decades before Social Security, the latter of which seems to dominate the attention of Congress. A hope is that the Riley Institute's conference will shed light on these and other crucial health issues facing South Carolinians.