## **National Journal**

## **Health Lobbyists Sound Alarm Over Sequester**

By Meghan McCarthy
Wednesday, September 10, 2012

Wednesday, September 19, 2012 | 9:30 p.m.

Medicare might be the dominant health care issue on the campaign trail, but Washington's biggest health lobbying groups have a message for lawmakers: Don't forget about us.

Although most of Washington expects that Congress will delay the automatic \$1.2 trillion in cuts to government spending before the end of this year, health lobbying groups from myriad industries are taking the threat seriously. And they are letting lawmakers and their staff know about the consequences of letting the automatic cuts hit—making their case directly to politicians, rather than to the voters who will decide whether to keep them in office.

The White House last week gave groups new ammunition with a report that put the sequester's cuts for fiscal 2013 in black and white. Medicare providers would lose \$11 billion, and the National Institutes of Health would lose \$2.5 billion.

Two groups that promote funding for health research, United for Medical Research and Research! America, are holding an event on Thursday morning to release data from pollster John Zogby on how voters view medical research.

"We are trying to sound the alarm here to representatives currently serving in Congress and to candidates running for office that there are a whole host of unintended consequences that will spew forth if sequestration goes forward," said Mary Woolley, president of Research! America, in an interview.

Woolley said the consequences of cutting medical-research funding don't come up often when lawmakers are out talking to voters in their districts—and that's a problem.

"We need a wake-up call for people in the Congress and people who want to be in the Congress taking the American prowess in medical research for granted. They don't realize the American public really cares, and we are going to show poll data that will show that fact," Woolley said.

Medicare providers—hospitals, doctors, and nursing homes—are also targeting lawmakers and their staff directly. The American Health Care Association, which represents nursing homes and long-term care facilities, released a television ad that features Beverly McKinney, an elderly woman who was hit by a car and recovered from a broken pelvis at a long-term care facility. Shortly after her injury, McKinney was discharged from the hospital that initially treated her. She gave credit to the long-term facility for her ability to walk again, highlighting the message that such crucial services could be at risk.

The ad is running through the week on cable channels within the Beltway, specifically targeted at Capitol Hill staffers and lawmakers. In the world of political ads and campaign talking points, explaining the sequester can be a challenge. But health groups are banking on the fact that even though lawmakers and their staff aren't hearing about the impact the sequester will have on health care now, they will if the cuts take effect and their constituents lose jobs, can't see their doctor, or don't get that life-saving treatment as quickly as they had been promised.

"We're running these ads to remind policymakers that cuts have consequences and [could] potentially jeopardize the tens of thousands of residents we care for every day," American Health Care Association CEO Mark Parkinson said in a statement.

Public hospitals that rely on Medicaid funding are one sector of the health care world that is an exception to the sequester lobbying frenzy. That's because Medicaid is protected from getting cut in the sequester.

"The Medicaid world, in general, has a different take on fiscal cliff than probably the rest of the health care field, because it's harder to think about how we could re-litigate this issue and the safety-net providers could be protected," said Shawn Gremminger, the assistant vice president for legislative affairs with the National Association of Public Hospitals, in an interview.

In other words, Medicaid providers fear that in an effort to get rid of the sequester, Medicaid programs will be tapped to offset costs. Because of that, Gremminger's organization plans to have a strong presence in Washington during the postelection lame-duck session. The hospitals group has booked hotels for their advocates, and they plan to fly in and walk the halls of Congress. They will also likely run ads opposing Medicaid cuts during that time.

Meanwhile, the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, and the American Nurses Association currently have a two-week ad running in publications on Capitol Hill, warning that the sequester's Medicare cuts could cost 766,000 jobs. In this economy, that's a pill few lawmakers will want to swallow.