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White House Meeting

IWU Nursing Head Gets Glimpse into Clinton Health-Reform Plan

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--The director of the School of Nursing at Illinois Wesleyan University got an inside look at President Clinton's health-care reform plan at a White House meeting this week called to gather policy-making advice from the deans of about 45 nursing schools nationwide.

Donna Hartweg, an associate professor and director of IWU's nursing school, attended the four and one-half hour meeting, Tuesday, April 20, in the Old Executive Office Building, which is part of the White House complex.

The goal of the administration's health-care reform package is to provide basic insurance coverage for all Americans regardless of their health or employment status. The broad objective is to provide health security for everyone in the same way that Social Security offers a "safety net" for senior citizens. The White House Health Care Task Force is headed by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Hartweg, the only representative from Illinois at the meeting, came away with the impression that "bright people, hard-working people--people who really care--are developing the health-care plan.

"It's so big and so complex," she added, commenting on the scope of the health-care plan. "It's a difficult task to complete, especially since there are some very powerful interest groups in the picture and the nation has some incredible health-care needs. But I'd like to believe it can be done."

The system under consideration, Hartweg said, would give states flexibility and would be community based. "They are not," she said, "looking for the federal government to micro-manage front-line health care. They are not writing a federal cookbook" of health-care mandates, requirements or standards.

She said 34 working groups are attacking the health-care problem and the administration is "closing in on a plan, making some decisions, forming some ideas, but the plan is not finalized."

The White House is targeting the middle of next month for unveiling its proposal, which some published reports say could carry a \$100 billion-a-year price tag. President Clinton intends to introduce the legislative package to a joint session of Congress. Despite the likelihood of a bruising political battle over the plan on Capitol Hill, the president has said he wants the sweeping reform plan enacted by the holiday season as a "Christmas present" of better health care at lower cost for the American people.

The nursing deans' meeting came one week after the White House Health Care Task Force parlayed with deans of university health centers and a week before a similar meeting is scheduled with deans of medical schools.

Among key administration players attending the meeting were Ira Magaziner, President Clinton's chief counsel on health reform; Charlotte Hayes, a top aide to Vice President Al Gore; and Marla Salman, a nursing official from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

According to Hartweg, Magaziner discussed four key points of the health-care plan: the need for a universal system, providing health-care security for everybody; an increase in the public-health structure to ensure care for those now under-served; the need for long-term health care (a component of the plan likely to be phased in over time); the need to control health-care costs.

The nursing deans were briefed on four basic principles surrounding the reform plan, which takes a holistic approach to health care: security for all Americans (currently, an estimated 100,000 Americans lose health-insurance coverage each month as a result of changing jobs); affordability; simplicity for patients and providers (the current system is too confusing, expensive, and cluttered with paperwork, according to critics); and continuity of care.

The nursing deans were apprised of the general framework of the administration's health-care plan: a major focus on preventing disease; a recognition of the wide range of health professions involved in delivering health care; and the need for formal mechanisms to serve as patient advocates to ensure that lifestyle and medical resources are delivered to those needing care.

A key discussion point for the nursing deans was the changing role of nurses under a national health-care system and how nursing education will be affected.

Among other aspects of the health-care plan discussed at the meeting were:

- The formation of health alliances--or purchasing cooperatives--which would cover large numbers of people, spreading risk, and better control costs since insurance costs are generally 40 percent higher for small groups.
- The issuance of a Security Card, a credit card-type device that would guarantee everyone access to the health-care system.
- A specific initiative to assist rural communities that are frequently under-served in terms of health services.
- The use of community-based health plans, which are bottom-up not top-down. Integral Community clinics and family planning centers would play a pivotal role in this approach.
- Incorporation of mental health services into the overall reform plan.
- A philosophy calling for a flexible health-care system, providing choice and high quality, with medical decision-makers being people who know the patients best.

The administration, according to Hartweg, believes the time is right for national health insurance because health-care costs are "eating up the economy," and an increasing number of people are denied health-insurance coverage.

Among others attending the White House meeting were nursing deans from Columbia University, Emory University, Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Pennsylvania, Howard University, Grambling State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Rutgers University, Ohio State University, University of Minnesota, University of Hawaii, University of Alaska-Anchorage, Indiana University, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Hartweg was named director of IWU's School of Nursing in 1991. She has been a faculty member since 1978 and served as acting director of the nursing school in 1990-91.

Before joining IWU, Hartweg held posts at the University of Iowa Hospital and at three hospitals in Champaign, Urbana, and Bloomington, Ill. At Wesleyan, Hartweg has been an instructor in medical-surgical nursing and an assistant and associate professor of nursing. She holds an adjunct appointment in the College of Nursing at the University of Illinois.

Hartweg's research interests focus on what healthy, middle-aged women do to spur their well-being. She is the author of several publications, including, "Dorothea Orem: Self-Care Deficit Theory," a monograph published in October, 1991, as part of a four-volume series detailing nursing concepts and theories.

Hartweg earned a bachelor of science degree in nursing from the University of Iowa, a master of science degree in education from Illinois State University, a master's degree in nursing sciences from the University of Illinois, and a doctorate in nursing from Wayne State University.

The IWU School of Nursing, founded in 1958, enrolls about 140 students. During the preceding 35 years, nursing study at IWU had been offered in conjunction with the Brokaw School for Nurses.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls more than 1,800 students in its College of Liberal Arts, a College of Fine Arts (School of Art, School of Theatre Arts, and a School of Music), and a School of Nursing. In 1992, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Illinois Wesleyan No. 1 in the Midwest among regional colleges and universities for the fourth consecutive year.