



Dynamic Chiropractic – April 20, 1998, Vol. 16, Issue 09

Interview with Congressman Charlie Norwood

By Editorial Staff

"... patients have lost their ability to choose health plans. They've lost their ability to choose their health care professionals, and the heart of that is they're being denied care." -- Congressman Charlie Norwood (R-GA)

Editor's note: DCs exclusive interview with Congressman Norwood (R-GA) took place in Washington, D.C. during the National Chiropractic Legislative Conference.

Rep. Norwood, an Evans, Georgia native, earned his undergraduate degree at Georgia Southern and went to Georgetown University Dental School, and was elected student body president his senior year. He served as a captain in the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam in 1969, and was awarded two Bronze Stars and the Combat Medic Badge. After his military service, Charlie and his wife, Gloria, moved to Augusta, where he began his dental practice.

Dr. Norwood was elected president of the Georgia Dental Association in 1983, and a decade later sold his practice to run for Congress. He won a landslide victory in Nov. 1994.

He is a member of the commerce committee, and the committee on economic and educational opportunities. His subcommittee assignments include energy/power, health/environment, workforce protection/commerce, trade, and hazardous materials.

Rep. Norwood is a member of the House Speaker's Task Force on Health Care Reform. He and Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) introduced the PARCA legislation to Congress (Patient Access to Responsible Care Act).

Charlie and Gloria have two sons and two grandchildren.

DC: Congressman Norwood, will you share with us some of your beliefs as a provider about what the PARCA means?

CN: What we're really trying to do is level out the health care system. It has gotten so one-sided as more and more people have been put into managed care; in fact, about 70 percent of the patients in the country. And as that has happened, patients have lost their ability to choose health plans. They've lost their ability to choose their health care professionals, and the heart of that is they're being denied care. There is no question that managed care is managed cost, and the idea is that you can save a lot of money and make health care costs less if you ration it. That's basically what we're doing, and we're trying to turn that around. The only way we know how to do that is to have some very reasonable national standards that don't mandate or legislate particular treatments, but give the insurance industry some guidelines, such as due process for both patients and providers; gag rules; access to care; emergency care; point of service; and then most of all, saying to people that if you're going to make decisions about medical care, then you have to be responsible for that. That's all there is to it. It's as simple as that.

Health care accountants who look only at outcomes simply cannot make decisions about medical necessity, and when we get that straightened out so that the accountants have to be responsible for their decisions, and I'm not talking about the employers, I'm talking about the administration of these plans, where they indeed have people making decisions that aren't always in the best interest of the patients. That's sort of what we're trying to get to.

DC: What's going to happen next in the passage of PARCA?

CN: We have 226 PARCA co-sponsors, from the most liberal to the most conservative members of Congress, and it's divided between Democrats and Republicans. That's where I want to be, and that's how you pass important legislation. It has to be bipartisan. We have five chairmen on our bill from the Republican conference, and that's very important. We're where we been trying to get to for three years, and that is to say to the leadership: "Listen, let's discuss this and let's come out with a bill this year that protects patients in reference to managed care." That's right where we are. Speaker Newt Gingrich has appointed a task force, which I'm on, and over the next couple months the task force is going to try to come up with legislation that does what we're all trying to do. I feel pretty good about the members that are on the task force. At the end of the day we may not have a PARCA; we may not have a bill by May, but we will have a bill this year that does what we're trying to do. If at the end of May we don't, we'll reform, regroup, decide

how we're going to go about it, but if the task force can't come up with the bill, I'm going to push mine, and go ahead and make the changes in it that we've been working on now for a year or two and just go for it.

DC: What can chiropractors and their patients do to help the PARCA bill become a reality?

CN: First of all, you folks have already done a great job. The congresspersons who are co-sponsoring the bill are being beat up in their districts with negative advertising. We need to go to them and say we understand; we're here to help and on your side. Give them confidence that just because they're running negative ads in their districts, we have to help take care of the legislators who are brave enough to support PARCA, though they're getting beat up by big business.

It's important right now to continue to have your patients contact their senators and their congresspeople to say we have a problem. We want you to help solve it, we want you to be involved. And then, of course, your organization as a whole is just doing terrific stuff out there, with television spots that you've rushed into areas that we needed to shore up. You've had some terrific print information that gets everybody's attention in this town.

All of us in this coalition, there's about 60 groups, have to keep the pressure on. PARCA is driving the whole conversation. If PARCA starts weakening, I promise you, so will the task force.

DC: People sometimes may feel a little powerless about what happens in Congress. What would you say to help them understand that they have power?

CN: People have tremendous power, more than the average person understands, and certainly more than even I understood before I came to Congress. When any of my constituents writes me a letter, I promise you, we're listening. We are, and I am, in the people's house. We represent people, and any good congressperson wants to know how their people at home feel about issues. I can tell you for sure in our office that is taken into account, and that is true for any congresspersons I know. When they hear from you, it counts. That's how we're going to win. Average Americans are going to win this, not me. And not just your organization, not just the providers of health care, but the American people are going to cause this to happen. But they have to keep sending those cards and letters.

DC: Thank you Congressman Norwood.



Page printed from:

http://www.chiroweb.com/mpacms/dc/article.php?id=37174&no_paginate=true&p_friendly=true&no_b=true