

Consumer News

How To Get The Care You Need

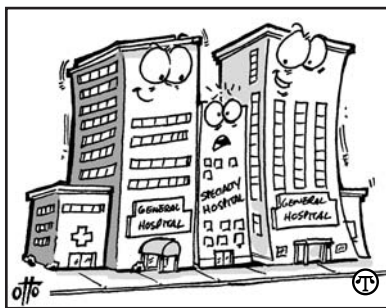
(NAPSA)—There's good news in the health care industry. Some hospitals seem to be delivering exactly what patients want—more cost-effective, quality care.

This care is being delivered by physician-owned specialty hospitals, which concentrate on cardiac care, orthopedics, spine and joint, or surgery. Driven by market demand, the specialty hospital industry has grown rapidly.

Despite that demand, that growth has been halted by Congress. In March 2005, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC)—ignoring its own research on the effectiveness and quality provided by specialty hospitals—recommended that Congress ban the development of new specialty hospitals until 2007.

Although the proposed bill to do so is titled the Hospital Fair Act of 2005, many have said it is not fair to consumers. The bill is the result of lobbying by general hospitals and the American Hospital Association who feel that specialty hospitals offer unfair competition, says Sean Parnell, vice president for external affairs at the Heartland Institute in Chicago.

“As it is with competition in any business, new entrants with superior products and lower prices raise the bar for incumbents,” said Parnell. “In this case, general hospitals as the incumbents are feeling the pressure and should reexamine their own standards of quality, care and cost effectiveness



A new bill banning the construction of specialty hospitals is not considered to be fair by many patients.

rather than questioning the innovative advances made by others.”

Research by MedPAC and the Lewin Group show that customer-focused specialty hospitals are indeed more innovative, competitive, efficient and cost-effective.

Research also shows community hospitals actually do better in communities that have to compete with specialty hospitals because they try to achieve the same level of excellence.

To Parnell, attempts to legislate the development of these hospitals is a heavy-handed overreaction by the government.

“This is a clear attempt by government to dictate your health care choices,” said Parnell.

Rather than prevent new hospitals from opening, he suggests studying specialty hospitals to learn why they work so well and to apply those lessons to health care in general.