

Obamacare won't swamp doctors, study contends

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Commonwealth Fund foresees only modest increases in use of services.

(HealthDay)—The greater number of Americans with health insurance under the Affordable Care Act will lead to only a slight increase in the use of medical services, and the health system can cope with the added demand, a new report states.

Once the law—sometimes called Obamacare—is fully implemented, the expansion in health coverage will lead to an almost 4 percent increase in visits to primary care doctors nationally, according to the Commonwealth Fund study.

Seventeen states will see increases of more than 4 percent, and seven states increases of more than 5 percent, the report found. The Commonwealth Fund is a private New York City-based health care foundation.

"This research eases concerns that primary care practices will be unable to accommodate people who gain new coverage through the Affordable Care Act," Commonwealth Fund President Dr. David Blumenthal said in a Commonwealth news release.

"However, continual monitoring of the capacity of our health system to meet increased demand will be necessary," he added.

The almost 4 percent national increase represents about 70 additional visits a year per primary care doctor, or slightly more than one more visit a week, according to the report released Wednesday. The rise in primary care visits will have only a slight impact on people's access to care, the researchers said.

Expansion of health coverage will lead to a just over 2 percent rise in emergency room visits and an almost 3 percent increase in outpatient hospital visits, the report predicted. Hospital admissions will rise about 3 percent nationally, and nearly every state will see 2.5 percent increases in prescription drug use/refills.

The study authors noted that their estimates are based on the assumption that all states will eventually expand Medicaid, the publicly funded insurance program for the poor.

"Millions of people have gained [health insurance](#) through the Affordable Care Act, and early indicators are that these people are satisfied with their coverage and able to get the health care they need," said report co-author Sherry Glied, dean and professor of public service at New York University's School of Public Service.

"These study findings suggest that pattern should continue after the law's full implementation," she added.

But a looming threat to the law is the pending U.S. Supreme Court case challenging whether the federal government can legally subsidize insurance coverage in the 34 states that chose not to run their own health insurance exchanges, or marketplaces.

A court ruling in favor of those challenging the provision would mean the number of Americans who can get and afford health insurance would probably revert to the levels seen before the Affordable Care Act went into effect, experts have said.

More information: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more about the [Affordable Care Act](#).

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