



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# Health Watch

September 2009 – Issue 62

# CHAIRPERSON'S CORNER

## 2009 Health Section Initiatives

by Jennifer Gillespie



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2009 has been a very busy year for the health section. Two activities in particular stand out:

### ***Visions for the Future of the U.S. Health Care System***

**A**t the beginning of the year, the Health Section issued a call for essays on the future of the U.S. health care system. We wanted authors to share their visions of what the U.S. health care system should look like: what the underlying principles are by which the system should be organized and by which competing reform proposals should be evaluated; how the key issues of access, cost and quality should be addressed; how actuarial concepts such as risk pooling and risk adjustment should be incorporated; and what the respective roles are for government, private-sector firms and organizations, and individuals. The results were successful beyond our highest expectations: we had over 60 essays submitted, and the quality of the submissions was outstanding. Twenty-nine essays were selected for publication in an e-book on the Society of Actuaries Web site, and we awarded prizes to the top three entrants from Health Section members. Thank you to all of the authors who submitted essays, congratulations to those who were published, and kudos to our award winners—Jim Mange, Ian Duncan and Jon Shreve.

We received some questions about the fact that only one of the published authors was a woman. We worked hard to avoid bias in selecting essays for publication and for selecting our award winners—at least half of the publication selection committee was female, and the authors' names were hidden from the group that selected the prize winners. However, I did notice—and was a little bit disappointed to see—that only three or four of the submissions were authored by women, even though women make up a much larger portion of the Health Section membership. I have since talked to several women who mentioned that they had considered writing an essay, but were too busy. Perhaps it's just the age-old adage about how a woman's work is never done; even with increasing support from their spouses, working women may still have a bigger "second job" than their male counterparts. Or maybe it's something else entirely. Whatever the underlying reason, this is

an issue that has surfaced before. A few years ago, someone did a study about the percentage of op-ed pieces in major newspapers around the country that were contributed by women: the Washington Post had 10 percent, the New York Times 17 percent, and the Los Angeles Times 20 percent. A recent Harvard Business School study also showed that both women and men are much more likely to follow male authors on Twitter than to follow female authors—although this is the opposite of what happens on other social networks like Facebook and MySpace, where both men and women are more likely to read content by women contributors. I really don't know what to make of all of this, but I hope we can find some way to draw more women into our ongoing dialogue on health care reform.

### ***Untapped Opportunities for Actuaries in Health***

Strategic work continues on the Untapped Opportunities for Actuaries in Health initiative. Actuaries who have transitioned from another field into health were interviewed last fall (along with their employers) to determine if there was a "repeatable path" that could be formalized to help others make similar transitions. However, we found that individuals' situations were unique; there were too few common threads to enable us to discern a general pattern.

This spring, several market research firms submitted proposals for studying other health-related fields. The work will be conducted during the summer and early fall.

This initiative takes on even greater importance with all of the activity around health care reform. By the time you read this, there probably will be several health-related bills before Congress, and we may have a better understanding of how the actuarial profession will be impacted.

### ***Council Leadership***

I want to finish my final Chairperson's Corner by thanking all of the Health Section Council and Friends of the Council for their terrific work this year! Thanks to their leadership, we had content-rich and well-attended meetings in Orlando and Toronto. We published three thick issues of *Health Watch*. A number

of research projects were kicked off and others were concluded. We established a special interest group for actuaries working in areas related to Medicare, and began looking into establishing a similar group for actuaries working in employee benefits. And as described above, we had a very successful first-ever call for essays on health reform, and we made great progress on the Untapped Opportunities for Actuaries in Health initiative.

It's time to say a special thank-you to those who have finished their terms on the Health Section Council: Barbara Niehus, Sudha Shenoy, and John Stenson. I would also like to thank Sara Teppema, our new Society of Actuaries Health Staff Fellow, and Jill Leprich for all of their support. Thanks also to Meg Weber and Steve Siegel for pitching in before Sara came on board. It's people like you who make this all possible. ■

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