End Medicare Freeze on Residency Training to Prevent Severe Doctor Shortage

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Lift the freeze on Medicare-supported residency positions to prevent a developing doctor shortage projected at more than 90,000 doctors over 10 years.

Problem:
The demand for physicians continues to rapidly increase while the supply of new physicians is limited by the current freeze on Medicare-supported residency positions. To address the projected physician shortage, medical school enrollment will increase by 7,000 graduates each year over the next decade, but academic medical centers lack the funding to appropriately expand residency programs.

Background:
● The population with the greatest health care needs, Americans over age 65 continues to rapidly expand (estimated 36% growth by HHS over the next decade).
● Health care reform will insure an additional 32 million Americans, driving the need for doctors.
● Shortages already exist in primary care, particularly in rural and inner-city populations.
● A third of all practicing physicians are 55 years old or older and approaching retirement.
● The cap on Medicare funding for Graduate Medical Education in 1997 was due to concerns over an excess number of physicians, which has proved not to be true.

Proposed Solution:
1. End the freeze on Medicare-funded residency positions
2. Direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to address the rising demand by appropriately expanding residency positions (the AAMC estimates at least a 15% increase)
3. Direct the Secretary of HHS to reserve an appropriate percentage of new residency positions for primary care residencies in order to address the shortage of primary care providers.