SECOND OPINION

Don’t overlook AAP principles on uninsured children

The February 2005 issue of AAP News contains an article about health care by Senator and physician William Frist, majority leader of the U.S. Senate. Sen. Frist spells out the Bush administration’s proposals for addressing the crisis of the uninsured as well as other health issues.

In the same issue is an article discussing how the Academy will strongly defend Medicaid against budget cuts, which will hurt poor children. This position is repeated in Dr. Carol D. Berkowitz’s “Letter from the President.”

Data from our own AAP research tells us that there were over 20 million children who were either totally without health insurance (9 million) or without health insurance at some time (11.5 million) in 2002. This is indeed a crisis that shows no signs of going away without meaningful and bold actions by advocates for children.

So I am most disappointed that nowhere in the February issue do we see our Academy principles regarding uninsured children spelled out. These principles, developed over a two-year period by the now disbanded Task Force on Access and Coverage, state that all children must have health insurance, without means testing, and with a quality benefit package. These principles were first spelled out in the 1980s by AAP President Don Schiff (1988-89) and colleagues, and were contained in the Children’s First legislation, introduced by the late Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.), a great advocate for children, and were adopted as AAP policy by our AAP Board of Directors. These principles also are included in the MediKids legislation introduced by Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) and Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.).

Some call universal health insurance, whether for children or all Americans, a dream. But dreams can be lived (paraphrasing historian Samuel Eliot Morison) and are far better than our present unconscionable and disgraceful national nightmare.

Hopefully, AAP News will provide the opportunity to hear from other national figures who have a more child-friendly and universal view than Sen. Frist. Hopefully, the Academy will stand firm on our principles and not compromise our long-term goal that all children must have health insurance. While we fight to protect what we have today, we must vigorously pursue the goal of a healthier and happier tomorrow for children and their pediatricians.

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Editor’s Note: The Task Force on Access and Coverage has not been sunset. It has become a formal part of the Academy as the AAP Committee on Federal Government Affairs Subcommittee on Access.