

Dear Patient:

It is rare that I speak directly to my patients about matters other than their physical health. But the general well-being of both you and your fellow Floridians may soon be negatively impacted by a coming crisis in healthcare coverage.

In the current economic climate, our state faces a looming \$4 billion shortfall in revenues. Budget cuts are high priorities at the state level. Legislators have already reduced hospital Medicaid reimbursements by \$250 million in the state's current budget. One area that is vulnerable to cuts is the Medicaid Medically Needy and Medicaid Aged/Disabled programs. Without additional revenues, legislators could cut the programs and eliminate healthcare coverage for 45,000 Floridians. These cuts will likely impact those who have insurance as the cost of care for the uninsured is passed on to patients with coverage.

Is there a way out? Yes, we believe so. The Florida Hospital Association and other leading healthcare organizations and community-based groups have joined together in a "Coalition to Heal Florida's Healthcare." The goal is to advocate for a \$1.00 per pack increase in the state's tobacco sales tax. If approved, this increase would become a permanent source of funding for the Medicaid Medically Needy and Medicaid Aged/Disabled programs. And, it would do something else – something that would benefit us all by reducing the rates of smoking in our state, especially among our youth.

It has been estimated that for each ten percent rise in the cost of cigarettes, teen smoking goes down by seven percent. With the tax increase, 123,000 Floridians will quit smoking. Money going for cigarettes, approximately \$1,500 per year for each pack-a-day smoker, might then be spent on approximately three months' of groceries for a family of four, or at \$1.70 per gallon, nearly 900 gallons of gas.

The proposed increase in the tobacco tax is a win-win solution to Florida's healthcare dilemma. It will help support lagging Medicaid funding for the needy and, at the same time, reduce the number of smokers, particularly the 4,000 young people who begin smoking every day. Such a reduction in smoking will have a positive impact on future healthcare costs.

Let's work together. Please take a moment to go to the Coalition's Web site: www.fha.org/coalition. With just a few clicks of your mouse, learn how you can inform your legislator, your friends, and your organizations about the benefits of an increase in the tobacco tax to Florida's healthcare.

The "Coalition to Heal Florida's Healthcare" is a grassroots organization. We provide an education kit, fact sheets, brochures, and answers to frequently-asked questions. Please contact **(name of coordinator)** at **(telephone number or e-mail)** to learn how you can become involved in bringing this message to others. Florida, like other states, is facing a fiscal crisis. But we must not sit back and watch as nearly 45,000 medically needy Floridians lose their healthcare coverage – a benefit that should belong to each of us.

Sincerely,

(Physician name)