ACPE Poll Shows Most Physician Leaders Expect Impact from Sequestration

From a drop in Medicare reimbursement to scaled-back funding for research and training programs, a majority of physician leaders say their organizations will be affected by the budget cuts caused by sequestration, according to a poll conducted by the American College of Physician Executives (ACPE).

The online poll, which was sent via email to about 11,000 physician leaders, drew 567 responses. Of those, 58 percent said the sequestration budget cuts would impact their organizations, while 22 percent said they would not. An additional 20 percent said they were unsure.

Participants in the ACPE poll were allowed to post comments, and many elected to do so anonymously. While many of the respondents expressed frustration with sequestration, some physician leaders said they would support any attempt to cut back government spending, despite the potential consequences.

"Although the cuts are crude, it's about time that some attempt was made to control the profligate spending by the federal government," wrote Richard Abramowitz, MD, FACC, FSCAI.

John Johnson, MD, agreed and said he hoped hospitals would take a cue from the government and cut spending.

"If we can reign in these out-of-control drunken sailors (no disrespect to real sailors, past and present), it will be worth it," Johnson wrote. "The hospitals are also spending on new everything and more buildings and then griping about poor 'them.' This is all insane."

Another respondent, who chose to remain anonymous, was more critical of the government's inability to find a budget solution before the sequester cuts were enacted.

"This is absolutely the stupidest way imaginable to solve our long-term fiscal dilemma," the respondent wrote. "In a weak economy, all intelligent economists favor more stimulus. We do not have a short-term fiscal crisis except as manufactured by obstinate politicians on the far, far, far right."

Others said they feared the sequestration cuts would disproportionately affect self-employed physicians who work in group practice settings, which may force them to join larger hospital or health care systems in order to stay afloat. Peter Angood, MD, CEO of ACPE, said the poll results show physician leaders have very strong opinions on the health-related policy decisions coming from Washington, D.C.

"No matter what your opinion on the sequester budget cuts, this illustrates the deep level of engagement our physicians have," Angood said. "Part of our mission at ACPE is to provide a platform for the fair and balanced voice of physician leadership, which we believe will resonate in Washington."

Another common sentiment expressed in the poll was a fear the full effect of the budget cuts won't be known for some time. By then, any potential damage to the health care system may be difficult to reverse.

As Craig Slater, MD, MBA, wrote: "While the sequestration may not be Armageddon, the impact on hospitals will likely be long-lasting and painful."

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