Training for an Uncertain Future

The words “health care” and “reform” seem nearly inseparable these days. When one appears, the other is sure to follow.

While many agree that a reevaluation of the current health-care model is long overdue, there is little agreement about how reform should be administered. Some people argue for greater involvement from the federal government. Others say Washington already plays too large a role and Americans would be better off choosing their own health-care options. Many doctors worry that Medicare reimbursements, already on the decline, will continue to fall, forcing them to take on even greater patient loads and further stressing all aspects of the health-care process. New legislation seems likely, but the debate will hardly end there.

Whatever the immediate outcome, Weill Cornell Medical College is not taking a passive role. Change is coming to health care, and as we train the next generation of physicians and researchers, it is our mission to ensure that the doctors and scientists of tomorrow not only keep pace with the shifting world of medicine, but also continue to push the boundaries of discovery and patient care.

Our fourth-year students take a two-week health policy clerkship—taught by Madelon Finkel, PhD, for more than ten years—that offers an overview of the non-clinical side of practicing medicine and exposes them to some of the issues they may be facing as they treat patients. This includes the confusing, and at times conflicting, restrictions placed on physicians and patients alike. “With the current debate among policy-makers and others about how our health-care system should be reformed, it is ever more important to give our students the skills necessary to navigate the increasingly complex health-care system,” says Dr. Finkel, who is a professor of clinical public health and director of the Office of Global Health Education at Weill Cornell. (For more on global health, see page 20.)

Student response has been enthusiastic. “The health policy course forced us to step back from our basic science and clinical courses and put our training into a real-world context,” says Anthony Rosen ’10. “We met industry experts who shared their often dramatically differing viewpoints on health care. The timing for the course was perfect, as we were discussing these issues as the health-care reform debate unfolded. I think that understanding health policy will be invaluable for me as a practicing physician.”