

Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Hearing
“The Future of Medicare: Recognizing the Need for Chronic Care Coordination”
May 9, 2007

I call this hearing to order and welcome all of our witnesses. I'm pleased today to be able to turn over the gavel to Senator Lincoln who will be chairing today's hearing on the need for chronic care coordination under traditional Medicare.

Today, 63 percent of our nation's Medicare beneficiaries suffer from two or more chronic conditions. Studies show that Medicare spends two out of every three dollars on seniors with five or more chronic conditions, such as diabetes, emphysema, heart disease, arthritis, or osteoporosis. These chronic conditions are largely preventable, treatable and their onset can often be delayed through coordinated care, nutrition and exercise.

Unfortunately, today's Medicare program isn't designed to serve those elderly individuals with multiple chronic conditions that make up the majority of beneficiaries. Traditional Medicare doesn't provide physicians with incentives to coordinate their elderly patients' chronic care conditions. As a result, many seniors are left receiving disjointed care, through multiple visits to different doctors every year at an unnecessarily high cost. Research indicates that Medicare beneficiaries with chronic conditions are more likely to have preventable costly hospitalizations, experience adverse drug interactions, undergo duplicate tests, and receive contradictory medical information.

At a time when our nation is growing older, it is clear that the success we have in preventing and treating chronic diseases will directly affect our ability to provide quality health care and contain future growth in Medicare spending. Today's hearing will shine a light on these shortcomings in Medicare and help us identify ways we can improve the care of our seniors, while making Medicare more efficient.

Now I turn the hearing over to the Aging Committee's greatest advocate for geriatric chronic care coordinate, Senator Lincoln. Senator Lincoln has shown great leadership highlighting these issues and bringing them to the attention of our committee. Since 2001, she has worked on legislation to improve the care of our nation's elderly and I'm proud to join her as she reintroduces the Geriatric Assessment and Chronic Care Coordination Act of 2007. I know Senator Lincoln has assembled a distinguished panel of witnesses and we look forward to learning more about the challenges that these beneficiaries and their physicians face.

We have an obligation to modernize the Medicare program and ensure that it is providing the quality care that today's beneficiaries need and I thank Senator Lincoln for all her work on this issue. I'll now turn over the gavel.