

**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
QUALITY LONG-TERM CARE**
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Member of the National Commission for Quality Long-Term Care Testifies for Appropriations Subcommittee

Mary Jane Koren, MD, PhD, a member of the National Commission for Quality Long-Term Care, today told a House Appropriations Subcommittee that our country needs to completely rethink the health care system currently in place for the elderly and in its place create a person-centered health care system.

Koren, who is assistant vice president of The Commonwealth Fund, told the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, that, “if we segmented the elderly population not by age cohorts or eligibility categories, but rather grouped them according to their health care characteristics, . . . our care delivery system would have a very different orientation and our current cost spiral might slow.”

Koren cited a commission report entitled, “Out of Isolation: A Vision of Long-Term Care in America,” which calls for long-term care to be brought to the forefront of the discussion of health care reform and outlines six broad focus areas on which it will issue recommendations: cultural transformation, empowering individuals and families, workforce, technology, regulation, and finance.

“Transforming long-term care is a matter of both head and heart,” the Commission declared in the report, which noted that nearly all the Commission members have a loved one who has needed long-term care services. “We are the sons and daughters, friends and family of the 1.4 million Americans who live in nursing homes and the millions more who depend upon family and paid caregivers in the community.”

“Today’s long-term care system strains to accomplish tasks for which it was never designed for a population whose magnitude was never envisioned,” the report says. “It does so while limited by a host of financial and regulatory constraints that can be more likely to stifle innovation than accomplish their original purpose of protecting the vulnerable. All stakeholders in the system confront a series of challenges.”

The 22-member bipartisan commission, headed by former Democratic Senator Bob Kerrey and former Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, includes two current

governors, current and former members of Congress, state officials, policy experts, aging advocates, physicians and health industry leaders.

The Commission will shortly issue recommendations on workforce issues, following a meeting in late January that heard testimony from Dr. Robyn Stone, Executive Director of the Institute for the Future of Aging Services; Susan Reinhard, RN, PhD, Professor and Co-Director, Rutgers Center for State Health Policy; Randy Lindner, MHSA, CAE, Executive Director, National Association of Boards of Examiners of Long Term Care Administrators; George Taler, MD, Director, Long Term Care, Washington Hospital Center; and Lee Goldberg, Service Employees International Union.

A background analysis provided to the Commission, “The Long-Term Care Workforce: Can the Crisis be Fixed? – Problems, Causes and Options,” identified three major issues:

1. There is a well-documented shortage of competent professional and paraprofessional personnel to manage, supervise, and provide long-term care services in facility-based and home-care settings -- the result of high turnover, large numbers of vacancies, and difficulty attracting new employees.
2. The instability of today’s long-term care workforce has contributed to:
 - Service access problems for consumers and, in many cases, has seriously compromised their safety, quality of care, and quality of life;
 - Excessive provider costs due to the need to continuously recruit and train new personnel and use temporary, higher-cost contract staff;
 - Extreme workloads for both nurses and paraprofessional staff, inadequate supervision, less time for new staff to learn their jobs, and high accident and injury rates exceeding those in the construction and mining industries.
3. As a result of growing demand from aging baby boomers and a shrinking of the traditional caregiver labor pool, the future will be immeasurably worse without decisive action by both the public and private sectors.

In meetings set for later this year, the Commission will address quality of care, technology and financing. Recently, the Commission recruited 10 new commissioners. They are: The Honorable Haley Barbour, Governor of Mississippi; The Honorable Phil Bredesen, Governor of Tennessee; The Honorable Nancy L. Johnson, Former Congresswoman from Connecticut; Mary Jane Koren, MD, Assistant Vice President, The Commonwealth Fund; Mike Magee, MD, Vice President, Science and Medical Advocacy, Pfizer Inc. and director of the Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative; The Honorable Jim McCrery, Congressman from Louisiana; The Honorable Earl Pomeroy, Congressman from North Dakota; The Honorable Gordon Smith, Senator from Oregon; Buck Stinson, President, Long-Term Care Insurance, Genworth Financial; and The Honorable Ron Wyden, Senator from Oregon.

Continuing members are: The Honorable Bob Kerrey, President, The New School; The Honorable Newt Gingrich, CEO, The Gingrich Group; The Honorable David

Durenberger, Chair, National Institute of Health Policy, Former Senator from Minnesota; Monsignor Charles J. Fahey, Fordham University; Michael Millenson, Independent consultant and the Mervin Shalowitz, MD Visiting Scholar, Health Industry Management Program, Kellogg School of Management; William D. Novelli, CEO, AARP; Richard Payne, MD, Director, Duke Institute on Care at the End of Life, Duke University Divinity School; Sister Mary Jean Ryan, President and CEO, SSM Health Care; Judith A. Salerno, MD, MS, Deputy Director, National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health (NIH); William J. Scanlon, Consultant; Sandra R. Smoley, RN, BSN, President and CEO, The Sandy Smoley Group; and Jeanette C. Takamura, MSW, PhD, Columbia University School of Social Work

About the National Commission for Quality Long-Term Care

The National Commission for Quality Long-Term Care is a non-partisan, independent body charged with improving long-term care in America. The appointed commissioners reflect a diversity of experience in government, academia, quality improvement and long-term care.

The Commission, which is overseen by The New School, grew out of an industry-led quality initiative called Quality First, A Covenant for Healthy, Affordable, and Ethical Long Term Care. In 2004, the three leading industry organizations called for an independent commission to:

- Evaluate the quality of long-term care in America;
- Identify factors influencing the ability to improve quality; and
- Recommend national strategies for sustainable quality improvement.

Funding for the Commission's work is provided by the American Health Care Association, the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, and the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care. However, these organizations do not have any decision making authority regarding the Commission's activities.

The Commission is housed at The New School and functions independently under the leadership of executive director Doug Pace. For more information, visit the Commission's Web Site at www.ncqltc.org.