



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 2, 2011

Contact: Berna Diehl
Jones Public Affairs
(202) 591-4045
Berna@JonesPA.com

Healthcare Coalition Focuses Attention on Patient Access Issues

FTC, AARP, CAC Share Goal of Preserving Consumers' Right to Choose Healthcare Providers

WASHINGTON – With experts predicting significant shortages of healthcare providers in coming years, representatives of leading healthcare professional organizations met recently to discuss how to ensure patient access to safe, quality care. During the annual leadership meeting of the Coalition for Patients' Rights™, a national group composed of more than 35 professional organizations, attendees heard perspectives from invited representatives from the Federal Trade Commission, AARP and the Citizen Advocacy Center on their shared goal of expanding consumer access to care.

“There are many organizations that have a unique and important role to play in protecting patients' access to healthcare providers and services,” said Karen Howard, a spokesperson for the Coalition for Patients' Rights, whose member organizations represent more than three million healthcare professionals. “It was invaluable to hear how other entities – working with the common purpose of enhancing care for patients – are tackling the challenges of ensuring meaningful access to quality healthcare.”

Attendees discussed continued efforts by some physician groups to restrict other healthcare professions from providing services to their fullest capabilities. The Coalition also emphasized the importance of basing healthcare practice regulations and legislation on objective research and evidence, rather than subjective or anecdotal discussions.

The Coalition was formed in 2006 to support the ability of all healthcare professionals to practice to the full extent of their education, qualifications and licensure. Within the healthcare landscape, there is increasing recognition of the role that professionals who are not doctors of medicine (MDs) or osteopathy (DOs) must play in order to ensure patient access to quality healthcare. For example, in the “Future of Nursing” report released in October 2010, the Institute of Medicine recommended that nurses, the largest segment of healthcare professionals in the nation, and other healthcare professionals should be full partners with MDs and DOs in redesigning the healthcare system.

“Healthcare reform means that the healthcare system will be hit with a tremendous influx of newly insured patients,” said Howard. “If we ignore the evidence around the quality and safety of care delivered by professionals like those within the Coalition's membership, and instead waste time on tired old turf wars, it will be patients who pay the price.”

Among the guest speakers was Tara Koslov, Deputy Director of the Office of Policy Planning at the Federal Trade Commission. She provided an overview of the FTC's work to promote competition in

the healthcare industry, including case studies of several recent law enforcement and advocacy matters. She said the FTC's work in the healthcare industry is ultimately rooted in ensuring that safe, high-quality and affordable services are widely available to the consumers and patients who need them.

Enhancing patients' access to competent healthcare professionals also is a focus at AARP. Dorothy Siemon, the organization's Director of Health and Long Term Care for the Office of Policy Integration, discussed AARP's efforts to make certain there are enough healthcare professionals to meet the aging population's needs.

Consumers can play a key role in supporting the movement for better access to healthcare professionals and removal of restrictions on their ability to practice, according to David A. Swankin, President and CEO of the Citizen Advocacy Center, which has made ensuring patient access to a broad array of healthcare providers – or “scope of practice” reform – a major policy initiative. The center believes that the range of services that any particular healthcare profession is permitted to provide should not vary by whim of state politics and urges consumers to weigh in on such decision-making at the state level.

“Patients should be able to decide who treats them, regardless whether that is a nurse, a psychologist, a chiropractor or a naturopathic physician,” Howard said. “Our healthcare system needs every licensed and certified professional working together to meet patients' growing needs. We are encouraged to see other organizations working to ensure patients can continue to choose from among a number of qualified professionals when they seek healthcare services.”

#

About the Coalition for Patients' Rights™

A national coalition of more than 35 organizations, the Coalition for Patients' Rights represents more than three million licensed and certified healthcare professionals committed to ensuring comprehensive healthcare choices for all patients. It was formed in 2006 in response to divisive efforts by the Scope of Practice Partnership (SOPP), an alliance of medical and osteopathic physician organizations including the American Medical Association (AMA), which aims to limit the scopes of practice of other healthcare professionals.

The Coalition is comprised of a diverse array of healthcare professionals, including advanced practice registered nurses (certified registered nurse anesthetists, nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives and clinical nurse specialists), audiologists, chiropractors, foot and ankle surgeons, naturopathic doctors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists and registered nurses. A full list of members is available on the Coalition's website: www.patientsrightscoalition.org.