



The Critical Care Assessment and Improvement Act of 2011 (H.R. 971)

Critical care medicine is the care of patients whose illnesses or injuries present a significant danger to life, limb, or organ function. Each year, five million Americans are admitted into traditional, surgical, pediatric, or neonatal intensive care units (ICU)ⁱ, and nearly 80 percent of all Americans will experience a critical care injury or illness as a patient, family member or friend of a patient.ⁱⁱ Critical care medicine consumes a significant proportion of our health care expenditures, representing 13% of all hospital costs, with the total costs of critical care services in the U.S. exceeding \$80 billion annually.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite the significant role critical care medicine plays in providing high quality health care and its impact on health care costs, critical care is often not understood as unique and distinct within the continuum of health care delivery. Yet providers of critical care require specialized training, the care delivered in the ICU is technology-intensive, treatment is unusually complex due to what may be a patient's system—or multiple system—challenges or failures, and the outcomes have life or death consequences.

Assessing the State of Critical Care in the United States

Currently the federal government lacks a national critical care strategy, resulting in uncoordinated efforts that fall short of meeting the critical care needs of the country. Recent health care initiatives have simply not recognized strengthening the critical care delivery system as a priority—an oversight that may jeopardize the nation's ability to effectively and efficiently care for the growing elderly population or the seriously ill.

Section three of the legislation would authorize three studies (Institute of Medicine, Government Accountability Office and Health Services and Administration Resources) to assess the current state of critical care delivery system— including its current capacity, capabilities and economic impact on the U.S. health care system— and identify future challenges that could threaten the nation's ability to effectively care for the critically ill or injured. These studies would raise the profile of critical care medicine and provide the policy foundation to implement a coordinated federal strategy to strengthen the critical care delivery system.

Creating a Research Agenda at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Critical care is a multi-disciplinary field of medicine, and as such, projects and funding related to critical care medicine are scattered throughout many of NIH's 27 institutes. Section four of the legislation creates a critical care coordinating council with NIH that would facilitate information sharing and coordination of critical care research projects, as well as raise awareness of the research amongst the critical care community.

Improving Federal Disaster Preparedness Efforts to Care for the Critically Ill and Injured

When a natural disaster or a pandemic—such as the H1N1 virus—strikes, the government must implement a coordinated medical response to effectively care for the critically ill or injured. Section five of the legislation would authorize several Health and Human Services (HHS) initiatives that would improve the government's medical response plans. These include ensuring there are sufficient number of critical care providers to respond in a medical crisis, developing best practices for the safe evacuation of ICU patients, and enhancing the current databases that provide necessary resource information in the aftermath of a disaster.

ⁱ Society of Critical Care Medicine. Critical care statistics in the United States.
<http://www.sccm.org/AboutSCCM/Public%20Relations/Pages/Statistics.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Society of Critical Care Medicine, Critical care questions.
http://www.mycucare.org/Critical_Care_Questions/Pages/default.aspx.

ⁱⁱⁱ Halpern NA, Pastores SM. "Critical Care Medicine in the United States 2000-2005: An analysis of bed number, occupancy rates, payer mix and costs," *Critical Care Medicine* 37 no.1 (2010)