

The key to high quality healthcare

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THE MASSACHUSETTS Medical Society has argued for 20 years that doctors are in short supply and should be paid more. Raja Mishra's June 7 City & Region story, "State's patients endure long wait," reiterates the society's complaints.

Doctors in our state face very serious problems. The Medical Society's demands for more money, while understandable, don't point to affordable solutions. Some facts may help.

First, there is no overall doctor shortage here. American Medical Association figures show that Massachusetts has almost four practicing patient-care physicians per 1,000 people, which is 54 percent above the national average.

Second, spending here on doctors and other professional services is 18 percent above the US average per person. We'd save almost \$2 billion this year if we spent at the national average.

Third, the main reason our doctors' average incomes are lower despite high spending is that so many want to work here. But with so many doctors already here, most of the huge number of new doctors trained in this state must leave to find jobs.

Finally, the state spends \$1 billion weekly on healthcare overall. Physicians are the key to making high-quality care affordable for all Massachusetts residents. Their decisions shape almost 90 percent of the health dollar. Physicians can heal themselves not by demanding more money but by working with patients and payers to better spend the vast sums already available.

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