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# Inglis gets doctor's opinion on care for older patients

TR physician describes difficult choice to limit Medicare patients

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U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis learned Tuesday in Travelers Rest why Dr. Stanley Coleman can't take new Medicare patients.

"With age comes increasing health problems, more complicated problems," said Coleman, one of four physicians at Travelers Rest Family Practice.

"And when you have to spend a lot more time with somebody, and when Medicare pays 80 percent of the cost, and you're seeing more Medicare patients for less reimbursement, you have to consider that when you sit down at your practice meetings."

It's a hard fact to swallow, Coleman said.

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With 28.5 percent of his patients on Medicare and the average Medicare patient taking at least twice as long as a privately insured patient, the tough decision was made to put a freeze on new Medicare patients.

Coleman's practice isn't alone, said Inglis, who has met with health-care providers, businesses and residents in the 4th District trying to find a way to reform the health-care system.

"We have to have some means to have everybody covered," said Inglis, who favors a consumer-driven approach.

Practice overhead -- which includes the building, staffers, supplies, technology and administration -- often runs 40 percent of earnings or more, Coleman said. And each time the federal government cuts Medicare payments or fails to increase them in line with inflation, fewer Medicare patients can be seen.

"From a humanitarian point of view, you've got to try to serve your community," he said. "But we have to look at it from a business point of view, too."

It's hard to turn away patients, he said, particularly when some doctors won't take any Medicare patients at all.

"Everybody's got to be willing to put their shoulder to the oak," he said.

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