

MEMORANDUM

TO: MEG
FROM: Skila Harris
SUBJECT: Action Plan
DATE: May 27, 1993

Based on conversations I had with Ira and Bob Boorstin this morning I have new information and perspectives on the what actions you should take today.

HCFA Numbers

Ira stressed the problems the Mental Health Working Group is experiencing with the HCFA actuaries are typical of the problems being experienced across the board by all the groups. He was EXTREMELY concerned about you making any calls to HCFA officials or Secretary Shalala. HCFA prides itself as being an independent actuarial organization and reacts negatively to any hint of political pressure to speed up or change numbers.

When Ira and others have pushed HCFA to explain its numbers, there have been leaks to the press about pressure to "cook the numbers". I agree with Ira that it would be extremely counter productive for an article to appear saying you had been trying to get the mental health numbers changed because that would be the story even though it isn't true.

I think as long as we can arrive at a statement that accurately describes the current status of mental health within the overall deliberations then the issue of the HCFA numbers diminishes.

Ira agreed to call HCFA today and prod them. Bernie spoke with them yesterday so they know we are anxious for the explanation of the numbers.

Recommendation: I do not think you should contact HCFA or other HHS officials.

Call To HRC

I think calling Mrs. Clinton would be very much in keeping with your relationship with her. You should discuss her thinking about how to respond to the press coverage of her statements and the numerous inquiries your office is receiving from mental health groups and Congress. Ira is going to have a similar conversation with her this morning.

Bob Boorstin thinks you should make calls to selected mental health leaders from groups and on the Hill to calm their fears. I suggest you ask Mrs. Clinton if she thinks this is a good idea.

Draft Statement

The most important goal we should have today is to reach agreement on a statement for you. The following draft language has not been reviewed:

Draft Statement For MEG

Everyone must realize that the Health Care Task Force has not finalized its recommendations to the President. The deliberative process is continuing and options still are being considered based on their individual merit as well as how they fit into the overall package.

In the area in which I have been most closely involved, the projected numbers for mental health benefits are still being developed and we are working from preliminary estimates at this time. There has been no decision on mental health benefits.

I know that many in the mental health community became concerned when they read or heard reports this week on Hillary Clinton's statements related to coverage of mental illness. I have spoken with Mrs. Clinton and she and I still share the same desire to achieve parity between physical and mental coverage and still are working toward that goal.

The complexity and confusion comes in how to achieve that parity and when. All this must be done, keeping in mind the tremendous financial constraints under which this country is operating.

As I have said many times, I may not get everything I want in the Plan but there is no doubt in my mind that President Clinton's proposal will represent a historical moment for those of use who care deeply about the health care each American receives. We will have turned a corner and have an open road ahead of us.

I ask you to keep the faith and continue to work to gather the support we will need to make this plan a reality.