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TESTIMONY BY THE
NEW YORK COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY
BEFORE A PUBLIC HEARING HELD BY
GOVERNOR ELIOT SPITZER
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Good morning. My name is Dr. Margaret Lewin, and I am president of The New York County Medical Society. I am also a practicing physician in New York City. On behalf of our County Medical Society and the more than 4500 practicing physicians who are our members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the healthcare system in New York.

As we approach the year 2008, we are also approaching what I think of as a perfect storm that could cause our healthcare system to implode. Many processes are operating at once and starting to speed up to bring this disaster upon us. We are losing primary care physicians, and new primary care physicians are not moving in to replace

them which is ominous because if this change continues, it will us cost at least one third more than we are spending now to run a

healthcare system. Obviously, without primary care, a patient with an earache would have to see an ear-nose and throat specialist. A patient with abdominal pain would have to see a gastroenterologist or general surgeon and so on. All these visits to specialists are VERY expensive.

Why are primary care physicians leaving the system?

First, because of the increasing cost of practice: Rents and employee benefits are higher, liability insurance is MUCH higher, and we have to budget MUCH more for the extra staff we now need to deal with the exploding amount of essential paperwork and to comply with the increasing stream of unreimbursed mandates.

Second, because reimbursements from insurance companies are being severely cut down.

Third, because of the ever-more-oppressive costs and threats imposed by medical malpractice liability.

Fourth, add to that the fact that our new doctors are starting out more than \$150,000 in debt. Although I've been in practice for 24 years, I couldn't in my lifetime pay that off!

Doctors who are already practicing are dropping out of those primary care specialties and procedures which don't cover all these costs. New doctors cannot afford to go into primary care.

With family practice residencies closing, their numbers are dropping dramatically. Eventually there won't be enough role models and teachers even to train those who still wish to go into primary care. Trying to recoup this will take at least a decade, in my opinion.

For all these reasons, the ranks of primary care physicians are being depleted; more and more patients will soon have to turn to specialists for care they should have been able to obtain at the primary level. That care by specialists will be more expensive. And thus, creating a system to insure healthcare in this state will become even more challenging than it is now.