

Presidential hopefuls smarter than health care policy wonks?

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By Lydell C. Bridgeford

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The Washington, D.C.-based event gathers over 1,800 senior executives and government officials from the nation's largest employers, health plans and health care providers to discuss health care strategies.

Halvorson spoke at a session examining the U.S. presidential candidates' health care platforms. Panelists also included the health policy advisors of Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain.

"In prior elections, the [health care] debates tend to focus on sound bites and simplistic proposals with elements of voodoo economics and wishful thinking," recalled Halvorson, whose foundation is one of the nation's largest nonprofit health maintenance organizations.

In this particular election, Clinton, Obama and McCain are talking about chronic care, health information technology, best practices for health care delivery, co-morbidity and racial and ethnic health disparities, he explained. All of which are key cost drivers in health care.

"The debate has actually progressed to the point where the presidential hopefuls are almost ahead of the policy wonks relative to having an understanding of what the health care issues are and what needs to be addressed," Halvorson added.

Instead of blaming some culprit or entity for the raising cost of health care, the candidates' health care proposals take into account that Americans are becoming more obese and are facing more chronic health conditions.

"The presidential candidates are talking about health improvement as a function of our culture, so it's very encouraging when you look at their platforms," Halvorson said.