

*Sample “letter to the editor” regarding Swine Flu outbreak*

*Emergency physicians are the nation’s safety net, a point that is driven home this week with the threat of pandemic swine flu filling ERs with patients fearing they are infected. Emergency physicians report volumes increasing by as much as 50 percent in some places, though fortunately actual incidence of the disease remains very low at present. Many of these patients have been directed to the emergency department by their primary care physicians. If we learn nothing else from this crisis, I hope that policymakers recognize the vital role that emergency departments play and involve emergency physicians accordingly in any health care reform planning. Emergency physicians treat 120 million patients a year, a number that is expected to balloon as baby boomers age into retirement. Our safety net is under extraordinary pressure during the best of times, and this week we have seen what might happen in the worst. The country cannot afford a collapse of its emergency medical care system, and yet that seems like a very real possibility.*