

Castle Tours State of the Art Virtual Intensive Care Unit at Christiana Care Hospital -- April 19, 2006

Highlights how Congress can address anticipated physician & nurse shortage issues

Wilmington, DE -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today toured Christiana Care's state of the art Virtual Intensive Care Unit (ICU) with Dr. Marc Zubrow, the Director of Critical Care at the Hospital. The virtual ICU allows one physician along with experienced nurses to monitor the status of patients in Christiana Care Hospital across the road and Wilmington Hospital which is more than five miles away, using computers, special cameras and high-speed data lines. While there are other hospitals throughout the country using the same technology to monitor intensive care units, Christiana Care is the only hospital in the U.S. that is using their virtual ICU to also monitor the emergency room.

"This state of the art facility is absolutely critical in providing care to patients whose situations can change at any minute. Here in Delaware we are proactively addressing this anticipated challenge through the use of technology and telemedicine, which is not only cutting edge, but also extremely innovative. Technology, such as a virtual ICU, can be used to improve lives while also improving delivery and quality of care. But we also need to do all we can to support and increase human man power by attracting physicians and nurses to this area of medicine."

Castle outlined a number of issues he is working on in the U.S. House of Representatives to help with this effort:

Workforce Training and Expansion

Title VII of the Public Health Service Act provides direct support for health workforce development and education. It is the only program designed to train providers in interdisciplinary settings to respond to the needs of special and underserved populations, and to increase minority representation in the health care workforce. Last year, funding for this program was cut by 51 percent and Rep. Castle is working to increase funding for this program back to FY05 levels -- \$299,552,000.

Nurse Reinvestment Act

Rep. Castle has been a strong supporter of the Nurse Reinvestment Act which does the following: The primary purpose of that legislation was to: establish nursing scholarships, create geriatric training grants for nurses, provide incentives for nurses to teach, establish a career ladder program to help nurses advance their careers; and, run public service announcements to promote the nursing profession. He has consistently advocated for full funding of the Nurse Reinvestment Act. ICUs nationwide have vacancy rate of 11.1% annually and it takes 62 days to fill a vacant position, according to the American Association of Critical Care Nurses.

Facts on ICUs from Leapfrog Group for Patient Safety :

- An ICU is a consolidated area of a hospital where patients with acutely life-threatening illnesses or injuries receive around the clock specialized medical or nursing care.
- More than four million patients are admitted to Intensive Care Units each year in the U.S.
- Mortality rates in patients admitted to the ICU average 10-20% in most hospitals. Overall, approximately, 500,000 patients die in U.S. ICUs each year.