

May 11, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the more than 240,000 surgeons and anesthesiologists we represent and the millions of surgical patients our members treat each year, the undersigned organizations strongly urge Congress to enact Medicare physician payment reform that would not only stop scheduled payment cuts but would also create long-overdue stability within the program by providing increases in Medicare reimbursement to physicians. Our organizations are strongly opposed to any proposal that would freeze Medicare payment rates at current levels for the next 5 years.

Because of the SGR, Medicare payments to physicians were cut 5.4 percent in 2002, and it was only last year that Medicare payment rates finally returned to 2001 levels. The uncertainty of possible cuts along with stagnant payments that have failed to keep pace with the rising costs of running a medical practice undermine the ability of physicians to plan for the future, to provide for their employees, and to make technological investments that could better help them serve their patients. If Congress fails to address this fundamental problem in Medicare reimbursement, the ability of millions of America's seniors and disabled citizens to access quality surgical care will be threatened.

This reality was demonstrated in a February 2010 survey of our memberships to determine what impact the 21.2 percent payment cut would have should it take effect and not be undone by Congress. In the event of a 21.2 percent cut, 37 percent of respondents stated that they would change their status to non-participating, and an additional 29 percent stated that they would opt out of Medicare for 2 years and privately contract with Medicare patients. Of the 31 percent who stated that they would remain Medicare participating physicians, 68 percent stated that they would limit their appointments with Medicare patients, 47 percent would reduce time spent with Medicare patients, 45 percent would stop providing certain services, and, to underscore the economic impact, 43 percent stated they would reduce the number of staff they employ. These responses not only demonstrate the peril of these scheduled cuts but the potential effect of stagnant Medicare reimbursement that fails to keep pace with rising practice costs over time.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure and improve all Americans' access to quality surgical care and share your commitment to make affordable quality health care more accessible. However, proposals that would merely freeze Medicare payment rates over the next 5 years fall short of this commitment and undermine our shared goal of improved access to care.

Sincerely,

American Association for the Surgery of Trauma

American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American College of Surgeons
American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics
American Pediatric Surgical Association
American Urological Association
American Society of Breast Surgeons
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery
American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons
American Society for Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma
Society for Vascular Surgery
Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists
Society of Surgical Oncology
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons