

Medicare Patients: Ask Congress to Help Keep Your Doctor

Dear Valued Patient:

We love our Medicare patients, but Congress is making it harder and harder for us to continue to care for them. At the present time, reimbursement for Medicare services is scheduled to be reduced by 21.2%, effective May 31st, after being delayed once at Christmas, until February 28th, then to March 31st, and then again until April 12th, to May 31st, then to June 17th, and today they announced that they failed to pass a fix. If this cut goes into effect it will become very difficult for us and other physicians to accept new Medicare patients and it may limit the number of available appointments for existing Medicare patients. To put this in perspective, the proposed rates are 8% less than the rates were in 1992 while the cost of running a practice has gone up by 50% more than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) since 2000. If enacted, the 21% cut will have an impact on access for new and existing Medicare patients. At present, we do not limit appointments to Medicare patients, but if the cuts are enacted, we may need to rethink participation. Doctors can no longer afford to subsidize Medicare.

Tricare, or health insurance for the military, is in even worse shape, because reimbursement for Tricare patients is even lower than Medicare reimbursement. Our military veterans deserve the best care money can buy, not the cheapest.

Through all these cuts, your Medicare premiums continue to go up. Payroll deductions for working people contributing to Medicare continue to go up. For ten years, doctors have pleaded with Congress to fix Medicare. For ten years, they've ignored us and allowed the problem to get worse. We have continued to see Medicare patients, but we are at a crossroads.

Next year the first wave of Baby Boomers turn 65. Allowing Medicare to collapse is the last thing we need at a time when Baby Boomers are starting to depend on the program, too. This is really a horrible situation for doctors and patients alike. Elderly patients, people with disabilities, and families in the military deserve secure and stable health care.

Congress understands the problem, but they have refused to take action for years. Every delay hurts more Medicare patients. The time for Congress to act is now. If Congress and Administration really want health system reform, they must fix the Medicare system. We need a rational Medicare physician payment system that automatically keeps up with the cost of running a practice and is backed by a fair, stable funding formula.

We urge you to contact your Congressional Representatives to express your concerns about this situation. You can do this by visiting the site: <http://www.congress.org>. You can identify your representative by entering your zip code in the "Get Involved" locator box. Once you have entered your zip code, all of your national and local representatives are listed with their web sites, contact form and national and local phone numbers. In addition, doctors are collecting

petition signatures online at www.ipetitions.com/petition/meltdown. If you want to contact your Senator by telephone dial (888) 434-6200. We are counting on our patients to help us make Congress hear the message.

- Tell your Congressman to establish fair payments to physicians.
- Tell them to get rid of the flawed Sustained Growth Rate (SGR) which is the root cause of this crisis.
- Tell them to stop cutting Medicare before you lose your doctors.

We enjoy taking care of you and your family. We hope that Congress acts in a reasonable and responsible manner such that we achieve the appropriate balance between being able to provide medical services for you and your family and to continue to receive high quality health care.

Thank you,

Doctors & Staff,