



TMAA NEWSLINE

ALLIED IN CARING AND SHARING

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Action Alert to all members – Posted December 1 2007

Your response requested by: January 1, 2008

The drastic Medicare physician payment cuts go into effect

Jan. 1, 2008 and unfortunately, there is no guarantee that Congress is going to update your spouse's payments—let alone keep them frozen at 2001 rates!

60 percent of physicians surveyed told the American Medical Association that they will be forced to limit the number of new Medicare patients they will be able to care for next year when Medicare cuts physician payments, and the deadline to make that decision is also looming.

Your state senators need to hear from you and your colleagues, your spouse's patients, office staff, family and friends today about the Medicare physician payment cuts! The Senate needs to take action and reach an agreement with leaders in the House of Representatives.

Here are three simple things you can do to keep the pressure on them:

1. Ask your spouse to urge ten of his/her colleagues, whether in your practice or around the country, to call their senators. Go to the American Medical Association's Medicare Physician Payment Action Kit to learn more, then call your senators using the AMA's Grassroots Hotline at (800) 833-6354.
2. Email a message to make your voice heard. Tell your own personal story: how will these cuts impact you and your patients?
3. Forward this message to your spouse's colleagues, office staff, family and friends.

Sponsored by: AMA Alliance Legislation Committee, working in concert with the AMA's Office of Advocacy Operations

Dates to Remember:

Jan. 25 – 26 Southern Regional Alliance Development Conference – Huntsville, AL (go to <http://www.amaalliance.org> then go to Events, Calendar, 2008 January. There you can click for Registration, etc.)

March 1 Deadline for submitting Health Grant requests

March 15 Deadline for Dolores Chandra Award Nomination

March 15 Final Membership Dues to TMAA Office

March 30 Doctor's Day

March 31 – April 2 AMA Alliance Conference and AMA National Advocacy Conference (NAC) – Winter Session – Washington, DC

April 18 – 19 TMA – TMAA Annual Meeting – Nashville Airport Marriott Hotel

Contact us: AMA Alliance, 515 N. State Street, 9th Floor, Chicago, IL 60610, amaa@ama-assn.org

AMA Alliance . . . Building healthy communities. The largest volunteer arm of the American Medical Association, the AMA Alliance is a public health advocacy network. To learn more, go to www.amaalliance.org

MEDICARE TALKING POINTS

Several Alliance members asked us to forward talking points about the pending 10.1% Medicare cut so you can call our legislators. Here are some suggestions for your calls:

- Just choose 2 or 3 points to make ... our Senators and congressman are aware of the problem ... they need to know how it affects health care and they need to know that people care enough to call.
- Be brief and be firm but calm (which is hard on such a frustrating issue)
- Call both the local and DC offices if your schedule permits.

Let me know if you get any specific feedback on the issue!

You can **call the AMA Toll-Free Grassroots Hotline** at 800-833-6354 ... give them your zip code and they will connect you to your legislator(s), or

Call them directly at the numbers below:

- Sen. Lamar Alexander: 423-752-5337 or 202-224-4994 (fax: 202-228-3998)
- Sen. Bob Corker: 423-756-2727 or 202-224-3344 (fax: 202-228-0566)
- Rep. Zach Wamp: 423-756-2342 or 202-225-3271 (fax: 202-225-3494)

If time permits, also call the key leaders on the Senate Finance Committee:

- Sen. Max Baucus (D-Montana), chair of Senate Finance, 202-224-2651
- Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), ranking Republican member of Senate Finance, 202-224-3744

Thanks for being active on this issue ... personal calls really do make a difference.

Impact of Medicare Physician Payment Cuts in Tennessee

The Medicare physician payment update formula is producing disastrous effects. In addition to generating the pending steep pay cuts, the formula:

- *Has kept average 2007 Medicare physician payment rates about the same as they were in 2001*
- Prevents physicians from making needed investments in staff and health information technology to support quality measurement
- Punishes physicians for participating in initiatives that encourage greater use of preventive care in order to reduce hospitalizations
- Has led to a severe shortfalls in Medicare's budget for physician services that have driven Congress to enact short-term interventions with funding methods that have increased both the duration of cuts, as well as the cost of a long-term solution

A medical practice is also a business and no business can continue long-term if they are paid less than the actual cost of a service. Medical practices today have had to add many staff to deal with insurance obstacles, pre-certification for

Happy Holidays from
your TMAA Leadership



Sarah Higgins
Darlene Vickers
Kathy Corlew
Suzy Smith
Leanna Wright
Suzanne Greer
Sharon Gerkin
Gail Brabson
Mary Ann Lovelace
Sue Vegors
Jo Terry
Robin Hutchins
Beth Kasper
Madeline Becker
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Melissa Portera
Kathi Hall
Dawn Richardson
Milli Yium
Mona Copeland
Nora Lee
Kathy Griffin
Annelle Bond
Barbara Trautman
Marcia Young

treatment, and other bureaucratic requirements. At the same time, reimbursement rates decreased or not kept pace with inflation.

Impact in Tennessee

- Tennessee will lose \$145 million in health care funds due to the projected 10% negative update in 2008, and the state will lose \$4.2 billion by 2015 due to 8 years of SGR cuts.
- 63,638 employees, 862,849 Medicare patients and 172,097 TRICARE patients in Tennessee will be affected by these cuts.
- Compared to the rest of the country, Tennessee, at 14%, has an above-average proportion of Medicare patients and, at 20%, an above-average proportion of disabled beneficiaries. In addition, at 17 practicing physicians per 1,000 beneficiaries, Tennessee has a below-average ratio of physicians to Medicare beneficiaries, even before the cuts take effect.
- 40% of Tennessee's practicing physicians are over 50, an age at which surveys have shown many physicians consider reducing their patient care activities.
- In 2008, the Tennessee locality will be cut an additional 1.24% due to expiration of the temporary GPCI increase included in the 2003 Medicare law.

In addition, most insurance plans base their own payment scales on Medicare reimbursements rates. As a result, most insurance plans can also be expected to cut physician reimbursement rates if the cuts take effect.

Here are some suggestions for your calls:

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- Be brief and be firm but calm (which is hard on such a frustrating issue)
- Call both the local and DC offices if your schedule permits.

A special thank you to Gail Brabson, VP Legislation; Melissa Portera, Asst. VP Legislation, and Rae Bond, Executive Director of Chattanooga Hamilton County Medical Society for this timely information.

TOP 10 REASONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

10. Making a Difference in your Community
9. Developing Leadership Skills.
8. Being part of a National Organization
7. Finding out about legislation affecting Medicine
6. Building a Network of Colleagues
5. Helping others with county projects
4. Getting to know your community
3. Meeting new friends
2. Supporting each other
1. Supporting the Family of Medicine

If you have not joined the Alliance, please do so now!! Our Future Depends

on Your Support!!!



REMINDER

We are striving to keep our calendar as current as possible. Please mail your county news to the TMAA office at:

TMAA
2301 21st Avenue South, P. O. Box 120909,
Nashville, TN 37212

We will try to promote your event by advertising it in our *Newsline*. Thanks for allowing us to help you.

If you would like to have your county alliance event publicized, please e-mail the information to the TMAA office.

Go to www.amaalliance.org to read more about the progress on Screen Out.