

*** AMA eVoice Alert ***

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Congress fails to avert Medicare payment cut

AMA continues campaign to prevent access-to-care crisis for seniors

As federal lawmakers begin the fall recess this weekend, physicians who care for Medicare patients still face a payment cut of 5.1 percent due to start Jan. 1, 2007.

"The AMA is disappointed that Congress is heading home for the elections without passing legislation to prevent Medicare physician payment cuts that will seriously erode seniors' access to health care," said AMA Board Chair Cecil B. Wilson, MD. "Eighty senators and 265 representatives have called on congressional leaders to stop the cut before Congress adjourns, but legislation has not been enacted. It is critical that Congress return during the lame duck session this fall to stop the Medicare cuts and tie payments to increases in practice costs to preserve seniors' access to health care."

Under current law, Medicare will slash physician payments nearly 40 percent over the next nine years while doctors' overhead costs increase at least 20 percent.

The AMA has worked closely with members of Congress on various proposals to avert the across-the-board 5.1 percent payment cut slated for 2007 and secure a positive update for all physicians. In addition, a number of other Medicare rule changes for 2007 will affect payments for many services, depending on each physician's geographic location and specialty. Nearly half of physicians are facing cuts totaling 6 to 20 percent. That magnifies the urgency of preventing the cuts that affect all physicians.

An AMA Member Connect Survey found that 45 percent of physicians will be forced to limit the number of new Medicare patients they accept into their practice when the cut begins Jan. 1.

"Physicians cannot continue on the current path of being paid less than the increased cost of providing care without serious consequences for patients," said Dr. Wilson.

The AMA and its state, local and national specialty medical society partners have presented a united front while working toward the long-term goal: to repeal the ill-conceived formula, known as the sustainable growth rate, that generates cuts in Medicare physician payments year after year, and to enact a solution that reflects increases in practice costs.

Although disappointed Congress has adjourned without passing legislation to prevent the cuts, the AMA will work with lawmakers throughout the fall to reach a solution that can be passed during the lame-duck session in November.

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