



*Sound Policy. Quality Care.*

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July 6, 2009

Honorable Max Baucus  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Finance  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Chuck Grassley  
Ranking Republican  
Senate Committee on Finance  
135 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Senator Grassley:

As the Alliance of Specialty Medicine, our mission is to advocate for sound federal health care policy that fosters patient access to the highest quality specialty care and improves timely access to high quality medical care for all Americans. As patient and physician advocates, the Alliance welcomes the opportunity to participate in the debate on Medicare and health care reform during the 111th Congress. We sincerely appreciate your ongoing work to craft a health care reform proposal that will benefit all Americans.

As you work to craft your legislation, we wanted to highlight our serious concerns with a proposal President Obama mentioned in a recent letter to you, Sen. Baucus, and Sen. Kennedy. Specifically, we strongly opposed to expanding the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission's (MedPAC) authority by making it an independent executive branch agency. Like Robert D. Reischauer, former CBO Director and MedPAC Vice Chairman, we find it extremely troubling that this proposal would require MedPAC's reimbursement and cost reduction recommendations to go into effect unless opposed by a joint resolution of the Congress. We believe that this takes many important Medicare reimbursement rules and decisions outside the purview of Congress and places them in the hands of unelected, and largely unaccountable, "experts." Given the critical impact that these decisions have on beneficiary access to quality care, we strongly believe that Congress should continue to exert strong oversight over these critical programs and not inappropriately relegate these critical duties to MedPAC.

The Alliance certainly understands and appreciates your growing concern with the rising costs of health care. We fear, however, that such a process and structure is fraught with potential unintended consequences – including restricting Medicare patients' access to important specialty care procedures and services –given the current nature and structure of MedPAC. MedPAC has neither the clinical expertise nor the research capacity to examine the national and regional effects of proposed recommendations to ensure patients are not unduly impacted. While MedPAC may be one important group of health policy experts, there are other important experts that must have adequate input into Medicare reimbursement policies.

We therefore strongly urge you to reject any proposal to alter MedPAC's current advisory status.

As you consider the next steps for health care reform, we hope that you will take into account our comments and suggestions, as well as the unique role of specialty medicine.

Thank you for commitment and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

American Association of Neurological Surgeons  
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery  
American Urological Association  
Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations  
Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
Heart Rhythm Society  
National Association of Spine Specialists  
Society for Cardiovascular Angiography and Interventions

Cc: Members of the Finance Committee, Senate leadership