

Explanation of Cancer Care Issues — *Cancer Care in Crisis*

What are the problems facing cancer care?

Six years ago the government changed the way that Medicare paid for cancer care. As a result, essential medical services and cancer drugs provided to cancer patients are underpaid, and in some cases, not paid at all. For example, the government does not pay for the essential treatment plan developed for every cancer patient. Because Medicare is the single largest payer of cancer care, it influences how private insurance companies pay for cancer care. So, this is not just about cancer care for patients covered by Medicare, but impacts all cancer patients, regardless of age and insurance coverage.

Just recently, the government announced additional cuts to Medicare payments for cancer care based on a very flawed survey for cancer care. In cases, the government would cut payments for the administration of life-saving cancer drugs by up to 38%. Additionally, there would be payment cuts for diagnostic imaging tests — such as PET and CAT scans — and radiation treatments.

What is the public insurance plan about and how would it impact cancer care?

Some lawmakers want to create a public insurance plan, which would be run by the government and compete with plans offered by private insurance companies. This is a real problem for cancer care if a public plan is created that is based on Medicare payment rates. As it is now, Medicare payment rates are unrealistic and will be even worse based on the government's new cuts. It is impossible for community oncology practices to continue to provide quality cancer care based on Medicare payment rates. Practices in many areas are already struggling to stay open with the current Medicare situation. If Medicare payment rates become the norm, practices cannot continue to provide cancer care to their patients. This is why any public plan created as a part of health care reform legislation cannot be based on Medicare rates for cancer care.

Our health care system needs fixing. How about cancer care in this country?

It is true that our health care system needs help and, therefore, reform. However, the United States has the best cancer care in the world. That's not just opinion but is proven by actual survival rates. Sadly, however, the world's best cancer care delivery system is in crisis and efforts to "reform" health care could make the crisis worse, rather than fix it. The cancer community wants to make cancer care even better but the crisis needs to be addressed.

What can our lawmakers do to support cancer care and help address the crisis?

In general, our Representatives (in the United States House of Representatives) and our Senators (in the United States Senate) need to hear a simple message NOW — *Help Stop the Cuts to Cancer Care!* Health care reform needs to fix cancer care; not break it further. Our elected officials in Congress need to help stop the government's new cuts to cancer care.

In terms of more specific help, there are several bills that they need to support by signing onto and fighting to get included in health care reform legislation.

The *Medicare Quality Cancer Care Demonstration Project Act of 2009*, which is bill H.R. 2872 in the House of Representatives, would create a national project to improve the quality of cancer care while controlling costs. It is the cancer community's answer to making cancer care even better in the United

States. There is a lot of talk about health care — H.R. 2872 is real action. Every Representative should sign onto H.R. 2872 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.

H.R. 1392 is another bill in the House of Representatives that corrects a technical flaw in the payment for cancer drugs. This flaw, relating to prompt payment discounts, causes cancer drugs to be paid at artificially low rates. As with H.R. 2872, every Representative should sign onto H.R. 1392 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.

On the Senate side (in the United States Senate), there is no identical bill to H.R. 2872, although the cancer community is working on one. So, every Senator should sponsor a bill in the Senate identical to H.R. 2872 and, regardless, fight to get the language in H.R. 2872 included in health care reform legislation in the Senate.

S. 1221 is an identical bill to H.R. 1392. Every Senator should sign onto S. 1221 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.

How can I get further information and the contact information for my Representatives and Senators?

You can go to the Community Oncology Alliance (COA) website at www.communityoncology.org for more information and a complete listing of congressional phone numbers, email addresses, and fax numbers. Look under the *Legislative Action Center*.