



CALL TO ACTION

Fix Cancer Care; Don't Break It Further

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. Thus, this is not just about cancer care for patients covered by Medicare, but about all cancer patients, regardless of age and insurance coverage.

Recently the government announced additional cuts to Medicare payments for cancer care based on a flawed survey of practice expenses. In some cases, the government would cut payments for the administration of life-saving cancer drugs by over 20%. Additionally, there would be payment cuts for diagnostic radiology tests and radiation treatments.

What is the public insurance plan 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 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 improvement: 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 Congress members (in the United States House of Representatives) and our Senators (in the United States Senate) need to hear a simple message — *Fix Cancer Care; Don't Break It Further*. We must help stop proposed new cuts to cancer care and to support not using Medicare payment rates for the basis of any new public insurance plan.

Several bills need support:

- The *National Quality Cancer Care Demonstration Project Act of 2009*, which is bill H.R. 3675 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. Not just talk about health care — H.R. 3675 is real action. We need every Representative to sign onto H.R. 3675 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.
- H.R. 1392 is another bill in the House 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. 3675, every Representative should sign onto H.R. 1392 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.
- S. 1221 is an identical bill to H.R. 1392. We need the Senate to sign onto S. 1221 and fight to get it included in health care reform legislation.