



For Immediate Release

March 16, 2006

NEW AMA SURVEY SHOWS MEDICARE CUTS WILL HARM SENIORS' ACCESS TO PHYSICIAN CARE

AMA Doctors Meet in Washington, D.C. to Urge Lawmakers to Stop the Cuts

WASHINGTON – Drastic cuts in Medicare payments to physicians will harm seniors' access to care, according to a new survey released today by the American Medical Association (AMA). The survey comes while AMA physicians meet in the nation's capitol this week to urge lawmakers to stop the cuts and set Medicare payments that keep up with the cost of providing care.

“Nearly half, 45 percent, of the physicians surveyed by the AMA say next year's Medicare cut will force them to either decrease or stop seeing new Medicare patients,” said AMA President J. Edward Hill, M.D. “Physicians want to treat seniors, but Medicare cuts are forcing physicians to make difficult practice decisions.”

The 2007 Medicare payment cut of approximately 5 percent is just the tip of the iceberg, with nine years of cuts totaling 37 percent now projected by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. While payments plummet, practice costs will increase 22 percent, according to the government's own conservative estimate.

“Medicare payments have not kept up with practice costs for years, and nine years of cuts are sure to make matters worse,” said Dr. Hill. “The cuts come as the first wave of baby boomers begin to enter Medicare in five years. By the time the full force of the cuts takes effect in 2015, 67 percent of physicians say they will be forced to decrease or stop taking new Medicare patients.”

The AMA survey foretells more bad news for patients as the health care community works for quality improvements. Over nine years of cuts, 73 percent of physicians will defer purchase of new medical equipment and 65 percent will defer purchase of new information technology. Next year alone, half of the physicians surveyed will defer purchases of information technology.

“As we work to improve quality, the large gap between Medicare payments and practice costs is a huge barrier to physician investment in technology used to improve quality,” said Dr. Hill. “If we want physicians to make investments to improve quality, Congress must ensure that payments keep up with practice costs.”

“The current flawed Medicare physician payment system places seniors' access to care at risk year after year by tying payments to the gross domestic product, instead of the health care needs of seniors,” said Dr. Hill. “AMA doctors are meeting in Washington this week to urge Congress to preserve Medicare's physician foundation for patients now and in the years to come.”

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