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Heart House

2400 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037-1153
USA

202.375.6000
800.253.4636
Fax: 202.375.7000
www.acc.org

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April 5, 2007

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee
219 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Grassley,

On behalf of the 34,000 members of the American College of Cardiology (ACC), I want to thank you for adding language (*amendment #548*) to the recently-passed Senate Budget Resolution that recognizes the importance of continued funding for financial incentives to encourage quality reporting by physicians under Medicare. We deeply appreciate your commitment to making the tools and resources available to ensure that Medicare patients receive the highest quality of care.

The Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) is not perfect, but it is a start. The ACC has an obligation on behalf of its members to work with Congress and CMS to improve the program for 2008 and beyond. At the same time, the ACC has and will continue to encourage its members to participate in PQRI this year so that our feedback and suggestions can be rooted in experience.

The ACC also commits to undertake a grassroots effort to educate your Senate and House colleagues about why continued federal funding for voluntary participation in PQRI in 2008 should be an essential component to whatever Medicare physician payment package is ultimately considered by Congress this year. Like our physician society colleagues, our top priority is preventing the scheduled 10 percent cut in physician payments from occurring next year. While we recognize that stopping the cuts will require a significant financial commitment from Congress, we hope lawmakers will not retreat from the initial steps that have been taken to create a payment system that consistently encourages and rewards appropriate, high quality.

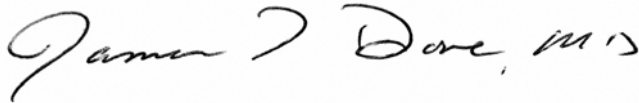
The ACC is currently working to identify new clinical measures for submission to CMS for PQRI reporting in 2008, as well as structural measures such as laboratory accreditation, use of electronic medical records, and participation in clinical data registries. We hope, if necessary, Congress will help facilitate the inclusion of structural measures in the PQRI and incentive payments for the use of tools that are designed to help build the infrastructure necessary for the collection and reporting of clinical data, which is strongly favored over the use of claims data and is necessary for true quality improvement.

I thank you for your leadership on behalf of physicians and patients. I also want to acknowledge Mr. Mark Hayes and Ms. Sue Walden of your staff who met with me during a visit to Washington, D.C., in February. They were both very gracious with their time, and were extremely thoughtful in their assessments of the challenges and opportunities that physicians face in the current health care environment.

The mission of the American College of Cardiology is to advocate for quality cardiovascular care — through education, research promotion, development and application of standards and guidelines — and to influence health care policy.

I offer the ACC as a resource to you as you wade through the complex issues of Medicare reform. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if I can ever be of assistance. I can be reached at (217) 788-0708 or jdove@prarieheart.com. Also, feel free to contact Camille Bonta, ACC staff, at (202) 375-6620 or cbonta@acc.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James J. Dove, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "D".

James Dove, M.D., F.A.C.C.
President, American College of Cardiology

cc: Jack Lewin, MD, CEO