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April 30, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus:

On behalf of the 34,000 members of the American College of Cardiology (ACC), I am writing to thank you for your efforts to provide relief from the cuts in Medicare physician payment that are scheduled to take effect on July 1. The ACC appreciates your willingness to work with the physician community on this important issue. I also commend you for working closely with Senator Grassley and other members of the Senate to pass a package of needed Medicare reforms before the physician payment cuts go into effect.

The ACC strongly supports your efforts to halt the 10.6 percent Medicare physician payment cut and to provide positive updates for 18 months as well as relief for physicians in rural areas. The ACC remains concerned that physicians will be facing steeper cuts in 2010. However, I do appreciate the fiscal constraints the Committee is under and am committed to working with you to find a longer-term solution to the flawed sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula. The ACC looks forward to working with you to replace the SGR with a new system that aligns incentives for the provision of appropriate, high quality patient care, and more accurately reflects physician practice costs.

The College is also very appreciative of your commitment to extending the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI). The ACC strongly supports continued funding for participating physicians and is eager to work with you on advanced forms of reporting and a greater bonus structure for specialties with a demonstrated commitment to performance measurement and clinical guideline adherence.

In addition, I am very hopeful that the Medicare package being prepared by the Committee takes a first step toward addressing the quality and appropriateness of medical imaging services. The ACC believes that the solution lies in the use of medical imaging appropriateness criteria to help physicians determine when and how often to perform a particular test.

*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.*

Therefore, the ACC urges Congress to develop a Medicare pilot program to test appropriateness criteria to determine how utilization rates are affected when these criteria are used. The ACC also supports mandatory accreditation of imaging facilities that provide MR, CT, nuclear medicine and nuclear cardiology in an effort to improve the safety and quality of medical imaging studies. Appropriateness criteria and accreditation will help ensure that the medical imaging services provided to Medicare beneficiaries are safe and high quality.

Finally, I am very supportive of your efforts to fund comparative effectiveness research, to set appropriate rules that allow for greater transparency in the relationship between physicians and health care industry, and to pursue policies that promote the use of electronic prescribing. The ACC supports comparative effectiveness research that reflects the principle that physicians and patients should have the best available evidence upon which to make choices in health care items and services. The College is also supportive of efforts to disclose relationships between physicians and the pharmaceutical and device industries. In addition, the ACC supports e-prescribing policies that provide adequate incentives and a realistic transition toward non-punitive, voluntary conversion. I look forward to working with you to further develop these areas of needed reform.

Again, I want to thank you, Senator Grassley and other members of the Senate for your commitment to passing legislation that provides 18-months of positive updates to all physicians. I look forward to working with you to develop a comprehensive Medicare reform package to ensure that patients continue to receive high quality health care.

Sincerely,



W. Douglas Weaver, MD, FACC  
President, American College of Cardiology