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John C. Lewin, M.D.

December 19, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus  
Chairman  
Senate Finance Committee  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Senate Finance Committee  
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Baucus and Ranking Member Grassley,

On behalf of the 34,000 members of the American College of Cardiology (ACC), I am writing to acknowledge your efforts in the "Medicare, Medicaid and SCHIP Extension Act" of 2007. I greatly appreciate your willingness to work with the physician community and congressional leaders to prevent another scheduled cut in Medicare physician reimbursement.

The College recognizes the many challenges faced in creating broad-based Medicare policies that address the flawed physician payment formula while, at the same time, finding health care offsets to fund the enormous cost. I am very relieved that the legislation prevents the scheduled 10.1 percent cut in Medicare physician reimbursement rate in 2008 and replaces it with a 0.5 percent increase as well as extends the Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI). In addition, I am appreciative of the many extensions related to physicians practicing in scarcity areas, raising the work geographic index floor, and other protections for seniors and children.

I am deeply disappointed, however, that the physician payment update is only for six (6) months and does not include funding to pay down the cost in the future. I am hopeful that this short-term extension is an indication that Congress plans to, in early 2008, craft a longer-term physician payment policy that, at a minimum, includes responsible funding for the remainder of 2008 and 2009 and advances quality improvement and the appropriateness of services provided. I believe it is essential that Congress immediately begin working on these policies in order to avoid unnecessary delay or impede patient access to physician services. Finally, I believe it is critical that Congress move away from providing short-term "band-aid" extensions that put physician practices in this untenable position year-after-year and work on a more permanent solution. I know you agree with us on this.

Therefore, the ACC eagerly looks forward to working with Congress to permanently fix the flawed physician payment system and move toward policies that seek to improve the quality and appropriateness of patient care.

Sincerely,

James Dove, M.D., F.A.C.C.  
President

cc: Jack Lewin, M.D., Chief Executive Officer

