

## **It's Time to "Cut" to the Chase With Congress**

Dear Colleague:

As the July 1 deadline to stop the 10.6 percent cut in Medicare physician payment quickly approaches, we are again faced with an uncertain future. Three weeks out there is still no positive update and no guarantee that these cuts will be stopped at all, let alone for good.

Since 1992 when Congress passed a new formula to establish physician payments, cardiologists have faced a continued and unrelenting reduction in payments for Medicare services. These cuts, coupled with a regulatory environment that is increasingly changing the way procedures are paid and ever-escalating costs of maintaining an office, make it difficult to attract new cardiovascular specialists to the field, keep current ones in practice and even more importantly provide all patients with the quality care they need and deserve.

Which brings me to the reason for this letter: the ACC has been doing all that it can at myriad levels to represent the interests of the cardiovascular community. We have been at the table with other medical specialty societies these last few weeks as Senate Finance Committee Chair Max Baucus (D-MT) works to finalize his Medicare Reform plan. We have also been working with Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-IA) to ensure the cardiovascular voice is represented as he crafts his own bill. The ACC continues to support both Baucus and Grassley in their efforts to stabilize physician payment for 18 months, while also helping ensure quality care for patients.

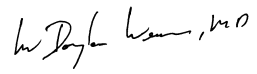
As of this writing, you have an opportunity to help us in our efforts. Sen. Baucus' bill is expected to go to the Senate floor next week. The legislation includes many positive elements for the cardiovascular community, including an 18 month Medicare payment update at .5 percent, an extension of the PQRI through 2011 and positive incentives for e-prescribing through 2013. On the imaging front, the bill includes an accreditation requirement for advance modalities and would fund a two-year voluntary appropriateness criteria demonstration project supported by the ACC. It does not include payment cuts to imaging services. Sen. Grassley's bill appears to be similar with an 18-month fix and a .6 percent update, but we are awaiting details.

It is critical that each and every ACC member call their Senators and urge them to support an 18-month positive update in physician payments, while opposing any cuts to physician services such as medical imaging.

We must be heard now. President Bush has threatened to veto any Medicare legislation that cuts payments to private Medicare Advantage (MA) plans to offset the bill's cost. HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt has suggested that lawmakers find offsets by making cuts to other providers within traditional Medicare. It will take all of us acting together to convince Congress and the White House to stop the Medicare cuts and oppose any further cuts in medical imaging. It is critical that when talking to members of Congress or their staff that you provide them with real feedback on how the cuts and the current regulatory environment are impacting your practices and ultimately your ability to provide patients with the quality care they deserve. They need to understand the real, hard impacts that these continuous cuts are having not only on our patients, but on our staff and on us.

To take action, visit [www.acc.org/can](http://www.acc.org/can) or call the ACC's toll-free Grassroots Hotline at (800) 210-7193.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug Weaver, M.D." in a cursive style.

Doug Weaver, M.D., F.A.C.C.  
ACC President