



Proposed Cuts Bring Clarity to Our Message

By Eileen Pummer, R.N., M.S.N.

The American College of Cardiology 2009 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., Sept. 13 – 15 drew record attendance, but the catalyst wasn't the growing debate about health care reform in the nearby halls of Congress. The 350 cardiovascular (CV) professionals, 20 of whom were Cardiac Care Associate (CCA) members, found themselves addressing an even more pressing concern — the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) proposed fee cuts.

Despite a clear desire to talk about various health care reforms with legislators, the group contended instead with a serious pocketbook issue. CMS' proposed 30 to 40 percent across-the-board reimbursement reductions for cardiovascular services stand to cause the closure of some practices and the elimination of CV nursing staff and other support services.

"Cuts of this magnitude will cripple cardiology practices and threaten access to services that prevent premature death and disability for millions of Americans," said ACC CEO Jack Lewin. "For advocacy leaders, the need for overarching health reform that focuses on both reducing costs and improving quality is where the dialogue should have been. ACC's history of well-crafted partnerships among legislators was seen as even more critical this year in expediting the progress needed."

Rather than lobbying for health care reform proposals that could benefit CV practices, the group was consigned to lobbying members of the Senate and House of Representatives to write letters on their behalf to CMS to halt the fee proposal.

CCAs' Involvement and What It Means

Shortly before the conference started, 13 CCAs attended a first-ever breakout session to discuss what to expect during visits with members of Congress and their staffs. Part of the discussion centered on sharing real-life examples of patients to help these Washington insiders understand the human dimension of their decisions. They planned to share these sad realities — the needless deaths of patients who would have been spared if preventive care had been available; those who didn't get treatment soon enough after learning of the gravity

of their illness and the stress and pain suffered by families or individuals without insurance.

With mortality and morbidity reduced nearly 30 percent in recent years, CCAs know what is at stake and the potentially dangerous backsliding that the proposed CMS cuts will mean for the patients for whom they provide care.

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Lewin later offered encouragement to the entire conference: "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

From my perspective, CCAs have the opportunity to make a huge difference. As a cardiac quality specialist, I no longer provide direct care for patients in CCU, yet I know all too well that by keeping the emphasis on patient-centered, quality-focused and cost-effective care, we will be providing the most clinically effective advocacy possible. Meeting personally with Congressional leaders in Washington, D.C., and being in a position to help policymakers understand today's health care landscape has helped me to see the importance of that involvement.

Pummer is Quality Manager, Quality Improvement and Patient Safety Department, Stanford Hospital and Clinics, Palo Alto, Calif.



2007 The world-renowned New York Cardiovascular Symposium marks its 40th anniversary. Program Director Valentin Fuster, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.C., is only the second director in the history of this remarkable program.