



Congressional Letter Highlights Increased Racial Health Disparities and Barriers to Cancer Care in Proposed CMS Policy

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WASHINGTON--(Business Wire)--Citing concerns about barriers to cancer treatment and furthering racial disparities in the incidence and mortality of prostate cancer, eight African American Members of Congress wrote to Health and Human Services Secretary Sebelius about a proposed government policy to cut payments for radiation therapy. Led by Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-NY) and seven other Congressional Black Caucus Members, the letter raises concerns with a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) proposed payment change for 2010 which, if finalized, will result in a 44 percent reduction in reimbursement for radiation therapy used to treat prostate, breast, brain and other cancers.

The Meeks letter notes that the CMS proposed payment change is astounding given the impact on African American men "for whom a significant disparity continues to exist in the incidence and mortality of prostate cancer as compared to American men generally." Congressman Meeks has long promoted additional funding for research, educational awareness, and early detection for prostate cancer in African American men. In April 2007, Mr. Meeks introduced H Res 346 to provide federal support to end the epidemic of prostate cancer in African American men.

The Congressional letter says Members find it "particularly troubling" that the CMS proposed physician fee schedule "applies assumptions about the utilization of high-end diagnostic imaging equipment to the completely different area of therapeutic services like radiation therapy." MedPAC in a letter to CMS has stated that its data regarding utilization of diagnostic equipment should not be applied to radiation therapy machines.

CMS is currently considering comments to its proposed changes in the physician fee schedule for 2010. The CMS rule is expected to be finalized in early November. A copy of the Congressional letter can be found at <http://access-to-care.com/pdf/CBCLetterToHHS.pdf>

Access to Integrated Cancer Care (AICC) is an alliance of multi-specialty physician group practices organized for the purpose of promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of patients with cancer to access an integrated and comprehensive program of diagnosis, treatment, comfort and support of the highest quality.

Access to Integrated Cancer Care (AICC)

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