

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
Attention: CMS-1413-P
Mail Stop C4-26-05
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850

August 26, 2009

Dear CMS Administrator:

My name is Paul Cooley. I am 74 years old and a Medicare beneficiary from a rural community in Gerry, New York. I am writing in regard to a proposed CMS rule that my doctor at Western New York Urology in Jamestown recently informed me about. According to my doctor, this rule could significantly limit my ability to access local, quality treatment that is crucial to my well-being as someone who is battling cancer.

When I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I thoroughly researched every possible outlet for effective treatment. I visited potential clinics, speaking with numerous physicians, and read extensively about possible treatments. In that time, I considered robotic surgery or relocating temporarily to receive proton therapy at facilities in Florida or Indiana. After discussing these ideas with my family and local doctors, I decided to begin radiation treatment at Western New York Urology in Jamestown.

I made this decision for several reasons. I chose Western New York Urology because it had the most advanced equipment for treating prostate cancer, is in a comfortable environment, and is incredibly practical given where I live. First, the facility is located only six miles from my house. I am able to drive myself to state-of-the-art facilities in my community. In addition, I have been a patient here for almost 20 years. I am able to speak with my personal doctors and nurses, people that have cared for me for many years. We know each other on a first name basis, and they are able to make my treatment as painless as possible. When I arrive, they know immediately who I am and take care of me. I don't have to wait in long lines or fill out additional paperwork.

Because I can receive treatment in Jamestown, I am able to sleep in my own bed in my own home. I am also able to stay involved in my community. For thirty years, I was an English and Journalism teacher at my local high school. While there, I ran the school newspaper. I also coached baseball and girls' softball.

Although I am retired now, I still volunteer in community sports. I umpire youth baseball and referee basketball. I am also a custodian at my local church, a volunteer with the local fire department, and a contributor to my local paper. Throughout my life, my community has given so much to me, and I take pride in being able to give something back.

If I were unable to receive treatment in Jamestown, it would be extremely problematic for me and my family. My closest alternatives would be Cleveland, which is three hours away, or Buffalo, which is almost an hour and a half away. Both choices would be well over the 10 minutes that it takes me to get from my home to Western New York Urology's office in Jamestown. If I

underwent care in Cleveland, I would even have to move there temporarily so that I could receive treatment. For five days a week, I would have to sleep in a hotel. Only on the weekends would I be able to return home. As someone going through a life-altering event, I can assure you that I have increased tranquility and peace of mind knowing that I can sleep in my own bed.

As a Medicare beneficiary, I would also face increased financial burdens. Not only would I have to travel farther distances, but my wife, who suffers from diabetes, would have to travel with me as well. Health insurance currently costs me about one-third of my retirement income. These additional expenses would force me to drastically alter my lifestyle.

The cost of changing services might alter my decision to receive radiation treatment altogether. Without the facility in Jamestown, I would probably have opted for surgery, a process that both my doctors and family advised against, given my previous medical history. I would also suffer additional psychological and emotional stress from having to drive much longer distances and not being able to stay at home with my wife.

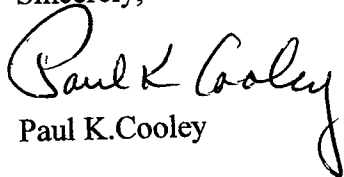
Being able to access care at Jamestown is important to me because it makes me feel the same as I did before, like nothing has changed. I am able to stay active in my community, and I am able to receive quality care from people who know me and that I trust, people who cared for me for many years. When visiting bigger facilities in Cleveland and Buffalo, I often felt lost. I felt as though I wasn't myself or even a person at all, like I was just another statistic. Larger facilities made me feel alone, something I don't want to feel given this stage in my life.

As someone who has been diagnosed with cancer and currently receives treatment, I believe it is important for CMS to understand that I am happy with the quality treatment I receive now. I am able to live my life in the same manner and access knowledgeable staff and state of the art equipment in my local community.

I dedicated enormous time to finding the best and most practical decision for me and my family. Western New York Urology's facility in my rural community in Jamestown was my choice, and I am thankful that I had that choice. I ask that CMS take extreme caution and reconsider this proposal before placing increased burdens on thousands of Medicare beneficiaries and other Americans just like me.

I feel that is of utmost importance that those of us in rural areas should have the same access to quality care as those who live in or near the metropolitan areas.

Sincerely,


Paul K. Cooley