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Congress Prepares to Prevent 2008 Physician Payment Cuts Proposed by CMS

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released its proposed 2008 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule last week, providing initial physician payment information for the upcoming year. CMS proposes to cut physician payments by 9.9% in 2008 unless Congress acts to stop the cuts by either altering the formula used to calculate payments or deferring the cuts to future years.

Draft language that would eliminate the 2008 cuts is currently being circulated in the U.S. House of Representatives. The goal of the legislation is to increase physician reimbursement rates in the short term and establish a new formula to calculate physician payments over time. The draft language has been added to legislation that would reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), and is expected to come up for a vote in the next few weeks. While details are not yet concrete, some of the major provisions include providing a positive increase of at least 0.5% in physician payments for 2008 and 2009 and plans to establish separate categories of services in 2010 (including such categories as primary and preventive care, imaging, major procedures, etc) while applying a revamped payment calculation to each of these new categories. The Senate has also expressed its intent to pass legislation positively affecting physician reimbursement, though not until later this year.

If Congress does not act, endocrinologists and other providers will experience cuts in reimbursement for procedures and office visits in 2008. While some services have had an increase in the work values associated with the codes, the conversion factor used to calculate payment rates is expected to decrease in 2008, thus decreasing the overall reimbursement rate. In 2007, the conversion factor was \$37.8975, while the estimated conversion factor for 2008 has been reduced to \$34.1352. Procedures that have been affected by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 (DRA), will again face additional cuts in 2008.

Payment rates and the 2008 conversion factor will not be finalized until November. A copy of the notice detailing the proposed changes can be found at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/PhysicianFeeSched/PFSFRN/itemdetail.asp?filterType=none&filterByDID=-99&sortByDID=4&sortOrder=ascending&itemID=CMS1200867&intNumPerPage=10>.

The Society will submit comments to CMS outlining issues of concern to endocrinologists, and future issues of *Endocrine Insider* will include further information on the provisions of the proposed rule.

Society Represents Members' Concerns at CSR Open House Meetings

As part of its efforts to preserve and improve the peer review system, the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is holding a series of Open House meetings throughout the year to address two specific questions regarding the current study section structure and the future of science. (Follow the link below to view the two questions.) The Endocrine Society is participating in the meetings to ensure that the concerns of endocrinologists are heard during the process.

The Open House meetings are designed to determine whether the current study section structure permits fair and adequate review of grant applications given the state of science today and to identify any changes that must be made for the future. In order to gauge the opinion of the endocrine community, Society Vice Presidents Lynnette Nieman, MD (Clinical Science) and Henry Kronenberg, MD (Basic Science) solicited feedback from members. Members were asked to email their thoughts to Society staff for compilation and review by the Research Affairs Committee and subsequent communication to the Society's Open House representatives. Several members responded to the vice presidents' request and some themes emerged, specifically for the Endocrinology, Metabolism, Nutrition, and Reproductive Sciences study section.

The concerns of Society members will be raised by the representatives attending the upcoming Open House meetings. Though the original deadline for comments has passed, your feedback is still welcome and can still be considered by the Society's representatives. This is especially true for the Open Houses scheduled to occur on November 9 and December 18, 2007, to cover Integrated Biological IRGs 2 and Biomolecular IRGs, respectively.

Information about the Open House meetings is available at: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/OpenHouses.htm>. The Open Houses are highly structured and CSR considers only statements that address the two specific questions outlined on the Web site. Please send responses to only those questions to Loretta Doan at ldoan@endo-society.org.

Society Encourages Members to Respond to RFI

In addition to efforts by CSR, the NIH has taken other approaches to examining the current system of peer review. The Advisory Committee to the Director has formed a Peer Review Working Group to solicit and review feedback from the scientific community on ways to improve the system. The group has organized a meeting to occur during which it will solicit and hear feedback from the scientific leadership of professional societies. President Margaret Shupnik, PhD, will represent The Endocrine Society at the meeting.

The discussion at the meeting will focus on six questions outlined in a Request for Information (RFI) issued by NIH ([NOT-OD-07-074](#)). Society members are encouraged to respond to the RFI individually in order to make sure that their concerns are heard.

New Clinical Research Advocacy Tool Has Broad Application

The efforts of Endocrine Society members Jane Reusch and Janet Hall came to fruition last week when The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)

released a new clinical research advocacy tool. *Clinical Research: Bridging the Gap between Basic Science and Improved Human Health* defines clinical research and its place in the process of translating basic science discoveries to patient care, highlighting contributions to specific treatments and cures.

Drs. Reusch and Hall are current and past Chair, respectively, of FASEB's Clinical Research Subcommittee, which developed the advocacy tool. In addition to providing general information about clinical research, the PowerPoint presentation describes hurdles and obstacles specific to clinical research careers and addresses related issues in science policy. The broad nature of the presentation allows it to be tailored for targeted audiences (such as policymakers or members of the scientific or medical communities) to convey specific messages. The versatility of the tool makes it useful in any number of advocacy or educational efforts.

For more information and to view the clinical research advocacy tool, click here: http://opa.faseb.org/pages/PolicyIssues/clinicalresearch_ppt.htm

Society Members Contribute to Major Study on Childhood Diabetes

An article in the June 27, 2007 issue of *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* featured results of the first phase of the "SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth" study, a five-year project that gathered data on the incidence of diabetes mellitus among U.S. youth younger than 20 years old. Endocrine Society member, Barbara Linder, MD, PhD, contributed to the study's concept and design, analyzed and interpreted the data, and helped to obtain additional funding.

The multi-centered study, co-sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), included 10 study locations throughout the United States. The study is the first of its kind, enrolling approximately 9,000 children with diabetes under the age of 20 and from different races and ethnic groups.

Researchers examined several trends in the epidemiology of diabetes, including the increase in childhood obesity and its correlation to the increase in type 1 diabetes. Although no determination of cause and effect has been made, the SEARCH study elucidated an increasing prevalence of obesity in diabetic youth.

Endocrine Society member Rebecca B. Lipton, PhD, MPH, BSN, noted in a corresponding *JAMA* article titled, "Incidence of Diabetes in Children and Youth—Tracking a Moving Target," that rates of type 1 diabetes have been on the rise since 1980, concurrent with an increase in childhood obesity. Lipton cites two possible explanations for this: "One—obesity may be driving autoimmune beta-cell failure underlying type 1 diabetes or two—the increase in type 1 diabetes really represents unrecognized type 2 diabetes."

SEARCH phase I garnered such interest that the CDC and NIDDK agreed to co-sponsor SEARCH II, which began in spring 2006.

Society member Francine Kaufman, MD, a pediatrician, reviewed the results of the SEARCH I study and raised the issue of further examining hybrid diabetes—a condition that includes symptoms of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes—in the SEARCH II study. The primary goal of SEARCH II will be to document trends in quality of healthcare and cardiovascular risk factors. The study will also examine the characteristics of type 2 diabetes in minority youth and facilitate long-term care follow up. SEARCH II is scheduled to end in 2009.

For more information on SEARCH study results and ongoing initiatives, please visit www.searchfordiabetes.org.

Society Member Jeffrey Flier is New Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Medicine

Endocrine Society member Jeffrey Flier, MD, has been named the new dean of the Harvard Medical School (HMS), effective September 1, 2007. Dr. Flier has been a member of the HMS faculty since 1978, has served in various leadership and editorial roles at HMS and the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and is currently the George C. Reisman Professor of Medicine at HMS.

A member of The Endocrine Society since 1980, Dr. Flier received the Society's 2003 Edwin B. Astwood Award for outstanding research in the field of endocrinology. He is recognized for his research into the molecular mechanisms of insulin action and insulin resistance, as well as the molecular pathophysiology of obesity. Dr. Flier has served on the editorial boards of Society journals *Molecular Endocrinology* and the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* and has served editorial functions for the *Journal of Clinical Investigation*, the *American Journal of Medicine*, and *Science* magazine.

Dr. Flier has received numerous awards and honors throughout his career, including election into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001 and the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine in 2003. He received his bachelor's degree from City College of New York in 1968 and his M.D. from Mount Sinai School of Medicine in 1972.

For questions regarding articles listed in *Endocrine Insider* or information on advocacy and policy activities within The Endocrine Society, contact the Government & Public Affairs department:

Janet B. Kreizman, Senior Director
301-941-0252
Jkreizman@endo-society.org

Charles E. Blue, Director, Media Relations
301-941-0240
Cblue@endo-society.org

Stephanie Kutler, Assoc. Director
301-941-0254
Skutler@endo-society.org

Loretta L. Doan, PhD, Manager, Science Policy
301-941-0258
Ldoan@endo-society.org

Lisa Marlow, Manager
240-482-1392
Lmarlow@endo-society.org

Holly Whelan, Manager, Health Policy
301-951-2613
Hwhelan@endo-society.org

Aaron Lohr, Manager, Media Relations
240-482-1380
Alohrr@endo-society.org

Stacey Trunnell, Administrative Assistant
240-482-1389
Strunnell@endo-society.org