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Society Supports Medicare Meltdown Petition, Encourages Members to Sign

As reported in the April 15, 2010 edition of *Endocrine Insider*, Congress continues to work on finding a long-term solution to the flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula, which results in annual Medicare physician payment cuts that Congress must avert. Congress' unwillingness to identify and pass a permanent replacement for the SGR elicits deep concern from physicians across the country, and the Texas Medical Association (TMA) has launched the "Stop the Medicare Meltdown" campaign to press Congress to fix the formula. As part of the campaign, the TMA started a petition calling on Congress to **develop a rational Medicare physician payment system that automatically keeps up with the cost of running a practice and is backed by a fair, stable funding formula.** More than 57,000 individuals and 93 state and specialty medical societies have signed the petition. The Endocrine Society remains concerned about the impact that the annual payment cuts have on the ability of endocrinologists to run their offices, maintain their skills and the skills of their staff with additional training, and provide continuing care to their patients. As part of its advocacy efforts to ensure that Congress passes a permanent fix, The Endocrine Society has signed on to the petition, and encourages its members to visit the site and sign on as an individual. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/meltdown/>

NIH Approves Widely Used Stem Cell Lines for Federal Funding

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) on Tuesday approved 13 additional human embryonic stem cell lines for use in federally funded research, bringing the total number of eligible lines listed on the NIH website to 64. Among the recently approved lines were four submitted by the University of Wisconsin's WiCell Research Institute, including its H7 and H9 lines, which have been widely used in research.

The approval provides reassurance to researchers who might have been concerned about the work they performed prior to President Obama's Executive Order lifting the ban on federal funding of stem cell research. While the intent of the Order was to broaden the number of cell lines available for funding, it also presented ethical requirements in terms of the process by which the cell lines were derived, and it was unclear whether lines derived prior to the Order would meet these requirements. In its approval process, the NIH evaluates whether cell lines meet all the stated criteria.

An additional 100 cell lines have been submitted to NIH and are currently under review for approval. The complete lists of approved and pending cell lines are available here: <http://stemcells.nih.gov/research/registry>

Physicians' Votes Needed to Strengthen the Society's Voice in the AMA HOD

Through its seat on the AMA House of Delegates (HOD)—the policymaking arm of the American Medical Association (AMA)—the Society advocates for the interests of endocrinologists in AMA policy discussions. The AMA is asking its individual members to help shape the debate on health policy by voting for the specialty society that best represents them in the HOD.

To help the Society strengthen the voice of endocrinology in the AMA HOD, physicians should vote for the Society in the Specialty Society Representation Ballot. The online ballots are available [here](#).

For every 1,000 votes the Society receives it will get an additional delegate in the AMA HOD. The Society currently has four delegates, and increasing that number will provide the Society a more powerful voice in the debate on issues that affect endocrinologists.

Through the leadership of its current delegates Robert Vigersky, Susan Sherman, Daniel Spratt, and Vineeth Mohan, the Society has successfully generated a number of new AMA policies on issues important to endocrinologists, including bioidentical hormones, endocrine-disrupting chemicals, diabetes testing supplies, and generic drug bioequivalence.

Questions about the Society's work at the AMA HOD may be directed to Stephanie Kutler, Director of Government Affairs, at skutler@endo-society.org.

Society Member Roger D. Cone Elected to National Academy

Endocrine Society member Roger D. Cone, PhD, professor and chair of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine's Department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics, was elected as a new member by The National Academy of Sciences this week in recognition of his distinguished and continuing achievements in original research.

A highly respected investigator, Dr. Cone discovered the melanocortin system, a critical central circuit in energy homeostasis. Studies from Dr. Cone's lab have identified the melanocortin system as one of the mechanisms responsible for integrating information about energy intake and expenditure. Based on his findings, a defective melanocortin system has been identified as the most common cause of severe early-onset obesity in humans.

Dr. Cone was among 72 new members chosen by the Academy. The National Academy of Sciences is a private organization of scientists and engineers dedicated to the furtherance of science and its use for the general welfare. It was established in 1863 by a congressional act of incorporation signed by Abraham Lincoln that calls on the Academy to act as an official adviser to the federal government, upon request, in any matter of science or technology.

President Names Pediatrician to Head CMS

President Obama last week named Harvard Medical School and Harvard School of Public Health professor Donald Berwick as his nominee to head the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The nomination was not unexpected. CMS has been without an administrator since the President took office in January 2009, and Dr. Berwick's name had been mentioned as a potential candidate for the past several weeks.

Dr. Berwick, a pediatrician, is the president and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, a non-profit organization focusing on creating safety, effectiveness, patient-centeredness, timeliness, efficiency, and equity in the health care system. Major medical and patient groups including the American Medical Association and AARP have lauded Dr. Berwick's nomination.

The Senate is required to approve the appointment of Dr. Berwick, and confirmation hearings are scheduled to begin in the coming weeks.

Future issues of *Endocrine Insider* will provide details on any new developments as the approval process moves forward.

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:

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