



February 5, 2009

Society Advocates for Research Funding in Stimulus

The House Democrats' economic stimulus package, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was passed by the House on January 28 by a vote of 244-188. The legislation includes \$1.5 billion for grants, \$500 million for intramural construction, and \$1.5 billion for extramural facilities renovation for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The National Science Foundation (NSF) will also receive \$3 billion and Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science will receive \$1.9 billion.

The Senate Appropriations Committee marked-up its portion of the Senate recovery package on January 27 and included \$3.5 billion for the NIH to be used for grants, capital equipment, and intramural facilities. Senator Harkin (D-IA) introduced an amendment during floor debate on Tuesday, February 3 to add \$6.5 billion for NIH, which brought the total to \$10 billion. The Senate adopted the amendment in place of a similar amendment introduced earlier by Senator Specter (R-PA). NSF will receive \$1.4 billion and DOE will receive \$430 million if the package is passed in its current form. The Senate is debating the package on the floor.

The Society has been actively representing the interests of its scientists on Capitol Hill throughout the process. Society alerts have generated hundreds of letters to House and Senate members, reaching many key supporters. The Society also sent a letter, which may be viewed [here](#), to all Senators supporting Senator Specter's amendment to add \$6.5 billion to the economic recovery package for NIH. Once the package passes the Senate, the House and Senate will conference to come to agreement on the differences in the two packages; the discussions will likely include research funding. The Endocrine Society will continue to look for opportunities to influence the process to benefit researchers.

Physician Provisions Included in Economic Stimulus Package

The economic stimulus bill passed last week by the House of Representatives and currently under discussion in the Senate includes provisions important to endocrinologists and other physicians. A section of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will help to create and promote the widespread adoption of health information technology (HIT). In particular, the portion of the bill focused on HIT, known as the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, would provide incentive payments to eligible physicians who adopt and use a certified EHR system by the year 2015.

The program will provide payments over a five-year period through Medicare Part B. The total amount that a physician could receive would be capped and would decrease over time.

Beginning in 2011, eligible physicians could receive up to \$15,000 in the first year, \$12,000 in the

second year, \$8,000 in the third year, \$4,000 in the fourth year, and \$2,000 in the final year. Eligible physicians first becoming meaningful EHR users after 2013 would be subject to lower caps, and those who did not adopt EHRs until after 2015 would receive no bonus. Details on certified systems and eligibility requirements are not yet available and will be determined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.

In addition to HIT provisions, the economic stimulus bill contains positive changes to graduate medical education funding. The bill places a retroactive moratorium on a 50 percent cut to capital Medicare Indirect Medical Education payments scheduled to take place in October. In addition, it extends a moratorium on a series of Medicaid regulations that would eliminate federal matching payments for graduate medical education.

Both of these issues continue to remain in flux while the Senate debates the stimulus package. Stay tuned to alerts and future issues of *Endocrine Insider* for more information.

***Wall Street Journal* Turns to Society for Expert Comment on Bioidentical Hormones**

The Endocrine Society was recently approached by the *Wall Street Journal* to provide expert information on bioidentical hormones and HRT. Despite calls for caution and federal regulation, bioidentical hormones continue to be promoted as safe and beneficial, most recently by Suzanne Somers on The Oprah Winfrey Show on January 29. With information from the Society and its experts, the February 3 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* featured a fair and balanced look at HRT in the story “The 7 Things You Should Know About Hormones,” by Melinda Beck.

The Endocrine Society was able to respond quickly to the media request by relying on its position statement on [bioidentical hormones](#) and on its network of volunteers. The Society engaged in proactive media outreach by distributing a media advisory to national press encouraging interviews with Society experts to discuss the benefits and risks of hormone therapy. Nanette Santoro, MD, and Margaret Wierman, MD, lent their expertise to this effort.

The Society’s position statement, released in October 2006, was developed by the Clinical Affairs Core Committee in response to rising concerns of the efficacy and safety of bioidentical hormones. The statement calls for increased regulatory oversight of all bioidentical hormones. In November 2006, the AMA unanimously and enthusiastically passed a resolution introduced by The Endocrine Society and other concerned organizations supporting this position, and it stands today as AMA policy. In January 2008, the FDA issued a warning to seven compounding pharmacies making false claims about the safety and efficacy of bioidentical hormones (see the January 10, 2008 issue of [Endocrine Insider](#)).

The Endocrine Society continues to be a leader in promoting consistent regulation of bioidentical hormones and all HRT for the safety of patients. The Society will maintain its strong relationships with the media and policy makers to ensure the public dissemination of accurate information about the risks and benefits of treatment.

To read “The 7 Things You Should Know About Hormones,” click [here](#).

News Media Gather for Society's Science Writers Conference

Twenty reporters from major national news outlets and syndicated news services gathered in New York City on January 30 for The Endocrine Society's Hormones and Health Science Writers Conference. The event, held at the Grand Hyatt New York, presented a wealth of new and established data to inform reporters and dispel some common myths and misperceptions associated with often misunderstood endocrine disorders and treatments.



Dr. Wartofsky begins the conference with an introduction of The Endocrine Society and an overview of the issues.



The Reporters in attendance listen and take notes.

For the conference, the Society assembled a panel of leading physicians and researchers, with the purposes of building relationships with key health, medical, and science writers, and raising awareness of the endocrine system and its impact on overall health. The conference also positioned The Endocrine Society as the knowledge source for the media on the science and treatment of endocrine conditions.

The conference began with welcoming remarks from Society Past-president Leonard Wartofsky, MD, who is currently chair of the Advocacy and Public Outreach Core Committee (APOCC). Dr. Wartofsky introduced Society President Robert M. Carey, MD, who gave an overview of

The Endocrine Society, a definition of endocrinology, and an explanation of the role of the endocrinologist.

APOCC member Henry Anhalt, DO, served as moderator and explained the overarching theme for the conference, which was “Myths and Misperceptions.” Each presenter addressed a topic currently receiving significant media coverage, clarifying what was true, what was a misperception, and what new research is being done to shed more light on the issue.

The presenters were Hugh Taylor, MD (endocrine disrupting chemicals and the impact on reproductive health), Robert Lustig, MD (endocrine disrupting chemicals and the impact on obesity and pediatric obesity), Daniel Bikle, MD (the many uses of vitamin D), Brent Wisse, MD (the benefits and risks of weight loss surgery), and Nanette Santoro, MD (the efficacy and safety of hormone therapy, including so-called bioidentical hormones).

Among the news organizations attending the event were the Associated Press, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.

The presentations from the conference will be edited and posted on the Society's website within the next few weeks: <http://www.endo-society.org/media/writers/index.cfm>

Meeting with CMS, Society and Partners Request Changes to Bariatric Surgery Coverage

Last week, The Endocrine Society and its partners, the American College of Surgeons (ACS), the Society for American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgery (SAGES), and the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS), met with members of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Coverage and Analysis Group on the agency's proposal to limit coverage for bariatric surgery to patients with type 2 diabetes and a BMI equal to or greater than 35. Patients with type 2 diabetes and a BMI of 30 to 34 would be ineligible for coverage of bariatric surgery under the Medicare program.

CMS acknowledged in its proposed policy that very little data exist on the subject of bariatric surgery in patients with type 2 diabetes and a BMI less than 35. The Society and its partners stressed in written comments and in their meeting with CMS that eliminating coverage for this population would almost ensure that these data would never be collected, as such an exclusion of coverage would likely impair the ability to recruit and retain volunteers for the randomized controlled studies that CMS recommends.

At the meeting, the Society, ACS, SAGES, and ASMBS recommended that CMS issue a coverage with evidence determination (CED) to allow for additional data to be gathered in the area of bariatric surgery in patients with type 2 diabetes and a BMI of 30 to 34. CMS plans to release its final rule on this subject in the coming weeks.

Stay tuned to Endocrine Insider for more information when the final rule is released.

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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