

Dear Endocrine Society Member:

On July 18th, the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee held a hearing entitled "Use of Imaging Services: Providing Appropriate Care for Medicare Beneficiaries." The hearing focused on examining the dramatic increase in imaging services, and the Medicare cuts imposed on imaging services via the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA). Committee members were virtually unanimous in their opposition to the cuts for imaging services imposed through the DRA.

Members of the Subcommittee were all concerned that these cuts were made without adequate study on the potential impact to Medicare beneficiaries, or on the potential cost savings associated with imaging services. In addition, several members explained that the increase in usage is probably attributed to the fact that imaging technology has dramatically advanced and that imaging is an increasingly valuable diagnostic tool. Committee members expressed skepticism that the increase in imaging services was due to fraud or greed by physicians as asserted by The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) in their 2005 report to Congress. The MedPAC report identified that diagnostic imaging services paid under Medicare's physician fee schedule grew more rapidly than any other type of physician service between 1999 and 2003.

The Endocrine Society was in close contact with several members of the Energy and Commerce Committee prior to the hearing to ensure the Society's concerns were addressed. Prior to the hearing the Society met with the office of Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA) to discuss the fact that cost savings associated with imaging services were never examined by CMS or MedPAC. The Society asked that Rep. Capps question representatives from these organizations about the issue of cost savings during the hearing. The Society submitted as evidence of imaging cost savings a study on ultrasound-guided fine needle aspiration (FNA) procedures. This particular procedure represents documented cost savings as a result of reducing unnecessary surgeries and reducing the need for other diagnostic tests.

Rep. Capps posed the Society's question to both CMS and MedPAC asking if they had examined cost savings and highlighted the FNA procedure as an example of how imaging might actually save Medicare money. Both representatives admitted that neither organization had studied the issue of cost savings. Several members of the Subcommittee were surprised to hear that no savings analysis had been performed.

While no action on the cuts was taken by the Subcommittee during the hearing, it did provide a public forum for airing the problems associated with the cuts. The Society will continue to work with the Subcommittee and other members of Congress to halt the cuts scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2007. The Society is working to advance several pieces of legislation currently before Congress (HR 5238, HR 5704) that address the cuts and is examining other regulatory and congressional options as well. Please be on the lookout for future Society alerts regarding legislation to halt the cuts to imaging services.

The Endocrine Society
Department of Government & Professional Affairs

For more information contact the Department at Govt-Prof@endo-society.org