

April 30, 2009

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C., 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The Endocrine Society would like to take this opportunity to thank President Obama and the administration for its continued commitment to improving the health of all Americans through reforming the current health care system. The Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest and most active professional organization of endocrinologists representing over 14,000 members worldwide. Our organization is dedicated to promoting excellence in clinical practice, research, and education in the field of endocrinology. The Society comprises thousands of practicing physicians who provide care to patients with very serious medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, thyroid disease, and osteoporosis, among others. Included below are a number of issues that we ask you and the administration to consider when developing health care-related policy.

Patient Access to Care and Services

With approximately 45 million Americans uninsured in 2008 and the incidence of chronic disease growing, one of the largest tasks of the new Administration must be to address the health care needs of individuals who may have costly conditions, but not the health coverage, to manage them appropriately. In addition to the millions of uninsured, many Americans have health coverage that does not adequately meet their needs. Because endocrinologists treat patients with complex illnesses, some of them very expensive and debilitating chronic conditions like diabetes, obesity, and osteoporosis, our members have a unique perspective on the issue of patient access to care and services. This important perspective is demonstrated by our work to ensure that patients at-risk for osteoporosis have access to dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scans and in the enclosed position statement on patient access to vital diabetes medication and supplies. We are pleased that the administration and Congress continues to express its desire to see comprehensive health care reform. We encourage you to consider the needs of the sickest Americans and those with complex chronic conditions as the development of a health care plan takes shape.

Physician Workforce Issues

Recent research suggests that the nation is faced with a significant shortage of physicians in practice and that demand will exceed supply until 2020. The Endocrine Society is deeply concerned about the effect that this shortage will have on endocrinology and patient access to appropriate medical care. A study performed by The Endocrine Society and its sister societies found that in 2003 the national supply of endocrinologists was estimated to be 12 percent lower than demand and that the number of endocrinologists entering the market had continuously fallen over the previous 5 years. The authors of the study predicted that the gap would widen due to the aging of the population in the endocrine workforce and the growth in age-related endocrine disorders (i.e. diabetes and osteoporosis). The Endocrine Society supports conducting studies on ways to increase the workforce. Increasing both approved fellowship training positions and reimbursement for endocrinologists are two approaches that could be considered.

Physician Reimbursement

As you are no doubt aware, reimbursement for physician services has not kept pace with inflation over the past few years. In addition, the use of the sustainable growth rate (SGR), a formula that is fundamentally flawed, causes annual threats of significant Medicare payment cuts – the most recent of which was over 15 percent. The Endocrine Society has worked in support of abolishing the SGR and replacing it with a more

appropriate system of determining payments. We strongly encourage the administration to include physician payment changes as a portion of its health care reform agenda.

Physician Access to Technology (EMR)

The Society believes technology such as electronic medical record (EMR) systems are important tools in patient care and practice management. Unfortunately, EMRs are often cost-prohibitive, even for very successful medical practices. The Endocrine Society estimates that approximately 50 percent of its clinician members are not affiliated with a hospital system and therefore would be required to purchase an EMR on their own. While our members would like to use EMR technology, they simply cannot afford the high costs associated with purchasing and maintaining such a system. The Endocrine Society supports assistance programs such as those that would provide physician tax incentives or grants to purchase electronic medical record systems, and is pleased with the provisions outlined in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to help further the importance of health IT in the medical community.

Pediatric Obesity

According to the American Medical Association, from 1991 to 2001 the population of Americans who are obese increased by 74 percent. In addition, 15 percent of adolescents between the ages of six and 19 are overweight. Evidence has shown that toddlers of lower income families are three to four times more likely to become obese due to the lack of healthful foods readily available in their homes and communities. Co-morbidities associated with obesity—such as type 2 diabetes—are now seen in 20 percent of adolescents, and it is estimated that one in three U.S. children born in 2000 will develop diabetes. With the increased morbidity that accompanies obesity, the impact on future health and health care expenditures will be staggering. The Endocrine Society strongly believes that updated and comprehensive guidelines on pediatric and adolescent obesity were desperately needed.

The Endocrine Society's recently published guideline on *Prevention and Treatment of Pediatric Obesity* (enclosed) emphasizes the need for prevention; lifestyle modification; increased communication between the family, physicians, and school; a strong prevention team; and advocates in Congress. Proactive interventions are critical in the prevention and treatment of pediatric obesity, and we strongly encourage President Obama and his team to review these guidelines and strongly consider implementation of the identified recommendations.

The Endocrine Society supports policies that help to strengthen the health care system and the health of all Americans. We look forward to working with you, President Obama, and others in the administration on these issues. If we can be of assistance to you in any way, please contact me directly or Janet Kreizman, Senior Director, Government & Public Affairs at jkreizman@endo-society.org.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Carey, MD, MACP
President
The Endocrine Society