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July 5, 2011

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) recognizes the unprecedented need to take action to ensure the long-term fiscal stability of our nation through both revenue increases and responsible reductions in spending. However, the nation's medical schools and teaching hospitals are gravely concerned that proposed reductions in Medicare's support for graduate medical education (GME) would seriously threaten already tenuous access to doctors, and worsen a physician shortage your administration has repeatedly recognized.

Medicare's support for its share of GME costs has been effectively frozen since 1997, contributing to the current shortage of physicians. Further decreasing support for GME would only worsen that shortage. Therefore, in your upcoming meetings with congressional leaders, we strongly urge you to take GME cuts off the table to protect America's health.

The reductions to Medicare's support for GME included in proposals from the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform would increase shortages of primary care and other physicians the elderly (and others) rely upon. As you are well aware, 10,000 Americans will turn 65 every day for the next 19 years. While many will live longer and healthier lives, many also will develop multiple chronic conditions that will require regular medical care. Unless more physicians are trained, seniors and others will find it increasingly difficult to access both primary and specialty care physicians. With the number of physicians per capita expected to fall within the next decade—precisely when per capita needs of patients are increasing—timely access to a physician is already in doubt unless Medicare support for GME is expanded.

In a July 4th letter to the AAMC and other member organizations, Dr. Thomas Nasca of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) explained that a reduction in Medicare's support for GME would threaten the viability of primary care training at more than 300 institutions. For larger teaching hospitals, such as members of the AAMC's Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems (COTH), reductions likely would lead to fewer physicians being trained as generalists in those fields, as well as a possible decrease in the number of physicians rotating through Veterans Administration hospitals as part of their training. Ultimately, as Dr. Nasca notes, "America would risk sacrificing what is widely acknowledged as

the best graduate medical education system in the world.”

(www.acgme.org/acWebsite/home/ACGME_Statement_on_Medicare_GME_Reimbursement.pdf)

Proposals to cut essential funds that teaching hospitals depend upon to train doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals also would adversely affect the ability of these institutions to maintain vital, life-saving services, such as 24-7 trauma and burn units, that often are unavailable elsewhere in communities. Although they account for only 6 percent of all hospitals, COTH teaching hospitals provide one-fifth of all hospital care, and operate more than 80 percent of the country’s ACS-certified Level 1 regional trauma centers and burn care units. Lastly, a recent AAMC-commissioned analysis by the economic consulting firm Tripp Umbach found that cuts to Medicare GME at AAMC-member teaching hospitals alone would endanger these critical services and the non-physician jobs that support them, resulting in a loss of over 70,000 jobs as well as a \$10 billion a year loss to the U.S. economy.

Mr. President, America has the world’s best doctors and nurses because we have the best teaching hospitals. Our community has been proud to support efforts to improve our nation’s health care system, and we are working to improve the quality and efficiency of the care we provide. Any funding cuts that jeopardize our ability to provide America with an adequate supply of physicians, nurses, and other health care providers, as well as limit critical services, are a serious step in the wrong direction. Cutting the deficit is important, but cutting physician training at a time when our nation faces a critical shortage of doctors would threaten the health of all Americans.

Sincerely,

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D.
AAMC President and CEO