

May __, 2011

The Honorable
United States House of Representatives
_____House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the below signed state medical associations and national specialty medical associations, we are writing to express our support for the “Medicare Patient Empowerment Act” (H.R. 1700) recently introduced by Representative Tom Price, MD (R-GA). This legislation will help to preserve the patient-physician relationship by allowing seniors to continue to use their Medicare benefit, even with physicians who do not accept Medicare patients. We urge your support and cosponsorship of this bill.

Today, physicians face a dizzying array of challenges. Constant uncertainty due to broken reimbursement systems and a growing tidal wave of documentation and reporting requirements places a strain on the patient-physician relationship. Increasingly, physicians are searching for a way to reduce these burdens so that they may focus on what they are trained to do, namely provide excellent medical care to patients who depend on their guidance and skill while at the same time maintaining a viable medical practice. For a growing number of physicians, this means greatly limiting the number of Medicare patients they see or even leaving the Medicare program all together.

Unfortunately, for most Medicare beneficiaries, this also means the end of a relationship with a physician whom they have come to trust. Currently, seniors who wish to see a doctor who does not accept Medicare must pay for all services by that physician out of their own pocket. The physician may not seek reimbursement from Medicare for the care provided, nor will Medicare reimburse the beneficiary. This, despite the fact that seniors have paid into the program in the form of payroll taxes their throughout their working lives.

The Medicare Patient Empowerment Act would restore this guarantee of care from any physician for these seniors. For visits to a non-Medicare physician, the Medicare Patient Empowerment Act means Medicare would continue to pay the amount it typically covers today, with the patient paying the doctor directly for the difference between what Medicare pays and what the doctor charges. It would also enable physicians to help patients in financial need by permitting them to charge a lower amount than Medicare currently allows, something they are legally forbidden from doing today.

By allowing patients and physicians to independently and voluntarily contract for care, the Medicare Patient Empowerment Act puts control back into their hands and preserves the relationship with their physician. We urge you to cosponsor this legislation.

Sincerely,