

NEWS – CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK

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STUDY: PREVENTABLE HOSPITAL ERRORS HURT MEDICARE PATIENTS, COST BILLIONS

Health Reform Law Takes Steps to Reduce Number of "Adverse Events"

WASHINGTON – Today, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released a report detailing the prevalence of "adverse events" – infections, surgical complications, and medication errors – that cause harm to Medicare patients who have been hospitalized. Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), Chairman of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, commented on this report:

Chairman Stark: "Preventable errors hurt patients and cost Medicare billions. Congress has taken action to help fix this problem, including an historic investment in health IT and new incentive payments through Medicare for hospitals to reduce the number of preventable readmissions."

The OIG report examined adverse events from a representative sample of Medicare beneficiaries discharged from the hospital in October 2008. The OIG found:

- An estimated 1 in 7 of those experienced an adverse event during their stay;
- Another 1 in 7 experienced an event that resulted in temporary harm;
- Physician reviewers determined that almost half (44%) of these adverse and temporary harm events were likely preventable;
- Hospital care associated with adverse and temporary harm events cost Medicare an estimated \$324 million that month, or \$4.4 billion a year.

The health reform law takes several steps to reduce the number of adverse events:

- Uses Medicare penalties to reduce the number of preventable readmissions in hospitals;
- Requires the development of a comprehensive strategy to measure and improve quality of care at hospitals;
- Provides Medicare the ability to tie payment levels to quality of care;
- Tracks a hospital's rate of "hospital acquired conditions" and reduces payments to hospitals with the highest rate of these conditions.

Additionally, the \$20 billion investment in health IT as part of the Recovery Act will help providers track their performance and reduce medical errors through mechanisms such as providing critical information about each patient's medical history, allergies, and alerting hospital staff about potentially dangerous drug interactions.

For a link to the OIG report, please click here: <http://go.usa.gov/Cw7>