

September 13, 2011

Honorable Patty Murray  
Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Jeb Hensarling  
Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Congressman Hensarling:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, representing and supporting cancer patients and their health care providers, we urge you not to recommend any additional cuts to Medicare payments for cancer care. Over one-half of all cancer patients in the United States are Medicare beneficiaries, and the nation's cancer care delivery system is in jeopardy. Cuts in Medicare payments of the magnitude being considered would worsen the current crisis, decreasing access to quality care for all cancer patients. This is an unacceptable price, especially in light of the small savings identified in a list circulating of Medicare spending reductions. This list includes lowering Medicare Part B payments for drugs from the current rate of Average Sales Price (ASP) plus 6% to ASP + 3%.

Community-based oncology practices have already suffered significant cuts in Medicare payment and dramatic increases in administrative burdens, especially since 2004. Although these practices are an efficient model for delivering cancer care, a recent study shows that 199 community-based cancer clinics have closed in the past three years and 369 practices, with multiple clinic locations, are struggling to stay open.<sup>1</sup> In fact, many members of Congress have recognized this reality and are supporting legislation that seeks to preserve patient access to treatment in their communities. Almost 50 bipartisan Congressional leaders have co-sponsored HR 905 (Whitfield/Green) and S 733 (Stabenow/Roberts) to improve access for patients to care and the viability of community practices.

If Medicare reimbursement for cancer-fighting drugs is further reduced, Medicare beneficiaries and other cancer patients increasingly will have difficulty finding access to the most appropriate cancer therapies. Even those individuals who are able to travel outside of their communities for oncology services will experience increasing and significant barriers to access. As more practices are forced to limit services and close, communities will face job losses for many important members of the practice including oncology nurses, physician assistants, and administrative staff.

The situation is further complicated by the growing cancer drug shortage, which is alarming and now receiving widespread coverage in the national and local media. In 2006 there were only 3 chemotherapy drugs in short supply, which exploded to 23 in 2010.<sup>2</sup> This problem is symptomatic of the crisis facing our cancer delivery system, which will be exacerbated by further reductions to Medicare payment levels for oncology treatment regimens.

We understand that you, your colleagues on the Deficit Committee, and your colleagues in the Congress will be balancing many interests and making difficult decisions in attempting to reduce the federal deficit. However, we urge you to seriously consider if \$3 billion — the CBO score of a payment cut to ASP + 3% — is worth the risk of further eroding the nation's cancer care delivery system and jeopardizing patient access to affordable, evidence-based cancer care.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Oncology Alliance – Community Impact Report Updated March 2011 - <http://www.communityoncology.org/COAStudies.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> University of Utah Drug Information Service

We urge you instead to develop policies that promote adherence to evidence-based care and quality measurement. Only in this way can we provide meaningful access to high-quality, cost-effective cancer care. This is a time of great promise in the fight against cancer and we urgently need policies that strengthen, not weaken, the nation's cancer care delivery system.

Sincerely,

American Association of Clinical Urologists  
American Society of Clinical Oncology  
American Urological Association  
AmerisourceBergen/ION Solutions  
Association of Community Cancer Centers  
Association of Physician Assistants in Oncology  
BDI Pharma  
Cardinal Health  
Community Oncology Alliance  
Health Coalition, Inc.  
Healthcare Distribution Management Association  
Large Urology Group Practice Association  
Leukemia and Lymphoma Society  
McKesson Corp.  
National Patient Advocate Foundation  
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists  
The US Oncology Network  
UPMC Cancer Centers

cc: Honorable John Boehner, Speaker, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader, US Senate  
Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, US Senate  
Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction  
Honorable Dave Camp, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Fred Upton, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Jim Clyburn, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Chris Van Hollen, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Xavier Becerra, US House of Representatives  
Honorable Max Baucus, US Senate  
Honorable John Kerry, US Senate  
Honorable Jon Kyl, US Senate  
Honorable Rob Portman, US Senate  
Honorable Pat Toomey, US Senate