

November 30, 2010

Forwarded for your information from the AOA:

Hi Folks – The post-election “lame duck” session of Congress has resumed, and I wanted to provide you with the latest on AOA’s efforts to avert threatened cuts in Medicare physician payments...

Late yesterday, by voice vote, the U.S. House approved legislation to provide \$1 billion to delay for one month a massive 23% cut in Medicare reimbursement rates for optometrists and other physicians that was scheduled to take effect tomorrow (December 1st). The Senate had approved the bill – unanimously – on November 18th. The President is expected to sign the measure today, making this the fifth short-term “patch” in the last year of the current Medicare rates.

Under Congress’s budgetary “pay-as-you-go” rules, bills to prevent cuts in Medicare reimbursement rates do not need to be offset, but amid deficit concerns only a fully funded bill was able to advance at this time. The one month extension will be paid for by a new CMS policy that reduces Medicare payments for multiple therapy services provided to patients in one day. In addition to redirecting the funds saved, the measure would reduce from 25 percent to 20 percent the discount rate used under the CMS policy to provide relief to affected therapists.

The AOA and a coalition of other physician and patient groups is working in support of long-term physician payment reform and an end to the uncertainty of the current payment system, although there continues to be no clear consensus among Democrats and Republicans on how to pay for a long-term fix. According to the Congressional Budget Office, a 13 month patch would cost about \$15 billion. A long-term formula fix through 2020 – which AOA believes is needed – would cost about \$276 billion.

Concerned doctors can take action and contact their U.S. Senators and House members on this issue through the AOA Legislative Action Center -- <http://www.aoa.org/x4821.xml> or by contacting the AOA Washington Office for more information on the Federal Keyperson program or AOA-PAC. Please let me know if I can get more information to you on this or other issues before Congress during the “lame duck.”

THANKS!

Jon

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