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Specialty Doctors Praise Private Contracting Bill

Rep. Price's Medicare Initiative would protect patients' access to the physician of their choice

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Washington, DC – Today the Alliance of Specialty Medicine endorsed a proposal that would allow Medicare beneficiaries and health care professionals to contract for items and services outside of the Medicare system and not be penalized.

The Medicare Patient Empowerment Act, H.R. 1700, sponsored by Rep. Price (R-GA), would establish a new Medicare payment option for patients and physicians to freely contract, without penalty, for Medicare services. Medicare beneficiaries would still be able to use their Medicare benefits and physicians would be allowed to bill the patient for all amounts not covered by Medicare without being forced to opt-out of Medicare for two years, as is the case under current law.

“As Medicare reimbursements tumble, and as the cost of running a practice continues to grow, it is increasingly difficult for seniors to find doctors who accept new Medicare patients,” said Dr. Alex Valadka, a neurosurgeon from Austin, TX and spokesperson for the Alliance of Specialty Medicine. “Much like an out-of-network benefit in private health insurance plans, this new Medicare payment option would enhance patient access to the physician of their choice.”

Over the past decade, physicians have faced cut after cut to their reimbursement rates. In 2010, doctors and patients were caught in the middle of a political tug-of-war as Congress went through several delays and patches to the Medicare reimbursement rate. Next year is no different and physicians will see a 30% cut unless Congress acts. Private contracting is a sustainable, patient-centered solution for the Medicare payment system that will ensure patients have access to the medical care they need.

“No one participating in the Medicare system wants to relive last year,” Valadka continued. “Medicare patients need to know that access to their doctors will not be put at risk because of the politics of Washington.”

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