



March 3, 2010

Congress Stops SGR Cuts through March 31; CMA Fighting for Permanent Repeal

Responding to strong pressure from CMA, AMA, and seniors, the US Senate last night passed HR 4691, legislation stopping the 21% cut to Medicare payment rates to physicians through March 31. The House had already passed the bill. President Obama is expected to sign the legislation shortly. Because Medicare contractors were instructed to hold claims for 10 days, physicians are not expected to face any cuts in Medicare reimbursements for any services provided in the first three months of 2010.

A delegation of CMA physician leaders from around the state of California went to Washington, D.C., this week to state the concerns of seniors, veterans, and the physicians who care for them regarding the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) cuts. Even without the cuts, Medicare rates have been stagnant for the better part of a decade, failing to keep up with inflation, much less the skyrocketing costs of providing care in California. The cuts would have made it impossible for many physicians to keep their doors open to seniors and veterans under Medicare and Tricare, even forcing some doctors to shutter their practices completely.

Congress has informed organized medicine that it is passing a temporary fix in order to maintain the possibility of passing a more permanent and lasting fix to the SGR formula as part of health reform. CMA strongly supports a permanent repeal of the SGR.

The effort to stop these devastating cuts is a reminder of the importance of organized medicine to the lives and practices of California physicians and the patients you care for. The victory is only temporary, but it is a victory nonetheless. CMA will continue to fight on this issue on behalf of the physicians and patients of this state. We cannot ensure physicians will be there to care for seniors and veterans until we permanently repeal the SGR formula.

Here's what you can do to help us in this effort:

- 1) Call California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and your House Representative TODAY to let them know the impact these cuts would have had on your practice. Tell them:
 - The Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate formula (SGR) *must be repealed once and for all* or Congress will permanently compromise the ability of seniors and veterans to have access to care;
 - Congress had more than a year to repeal the Medicare payment formula and ensure the security and stability of the program. Instead, *it abandoned patients who rely on Medicare and TRICARE* for their health care.

Use the AMA Hotline to contact your Members of Congress: (800) 833-6354. If the AMA hotline is busy, contact information for senators is available at <http://www.senate.gov> and for House Representatives at <https://writerep.house.gov>.

- 2) Send CMA your personal stories about how the Medicare cuts will impact your practice and how your offices will handle the cuts. If you have already made changes because of the uncertainty in the system this information would be helpful. We'll share the stories with Members of Congress and the press to highlight the impact of these cuts on real physicians and the seniors and military families they care for.

E-mail your stories to CMA at: memberservice@cmanet.org. If you have any questions, you can call our member help line: (800) 786-4CMA (4262)

Thank you for being a member of the California Medical Association and for standing with us in this fight.