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Access to Osteoporosis Testing for Americans in Jeopardy DXA Task Force Urges Congress to Pass Bill to Protect Patient Access

WASHINGTON, D.C., (April 3, 2009) — In an effort to protect patient access to osteoporosis testing and reduce the physical and economic burden of osteoporosis for millions of Americans, Congress introduced the “Medicare Fracture Prevention and Osteoporosis Testing Act of 2009,” (S. 769 and H.R. 1894). Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) introduced the Senate version and Representatives Shelley Berkley (D-1st-NV) and Michael Burgess (R-26-TX) introduced the House version.

The DXA Task Force, comprised of the National Osteoporosis Foundation, American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Rheumatology, American Society for Bone and Mineral Research, International Society for Clinical Densitometry and The Endocrine Society urges Congress to pass this legislation to reverse the drastic cuts in Medicare reimbursement for Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DXA), the imaging procedure accepted as the gold standard for diagnosing osteoporosis.

Outside the hospital setting, Medicare reimbursement for DXA has been reduced to levels substantially below the cost to perform the procedure. As a result, many physicians and clinics around the country are discontinuing this necessary health service — greatly limiting the public’s access to the test and jeopardizing patients’ quality of healthcare.

“Bone density measurements are vital tests that detect critical and treatable medical conditions, such as osteoporosis,” Senator Blanche Lincoln said. “Approximately 44 million Americans have osteoporosis and low bone mass. They may only discover that they have osteoporosis after falling and breaking a hip or other bones, injuries that cost billions of dollars each year. Ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have access to bone density tests is cost effective and can literally save lives.”

“Osteoporosis is a silent disease that often goes undetected until a fall or other injury results in a broken bone. The utilization of DXA testing is one of the best ways we have to help prevent osteoporosis-related fractures, which are costly and can be devastating to the overall health of older patients,” said Representative Shelley Berkley. “As someone who has been diagnosed with osteoporosis, I want all Americans to have access to these tests. We need to build awareness of this disease and the proper steps needed to maintain healthy bones.”

This legislation builds on federal initiatives already in place that support fracture prevention efforts and improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis, including recommendations of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, the 2004 Surgeon General's Report on Bone Health and Osteoporosis, and inclusion of bone density testing in the Welcome to Medicare exam.

Drastically low levels of reimbursement for the tests create unnecessary barriers for those who cannot take the time for multiple healthcare provider visits and pose a serious threat to the frail and elderly who cannot travel long distances, particularly those living in rural areas. According to estimates, less than 20 percent of those who are eligible are being tested for osteoporosis; this number is expected to plunge if patients' access to bone density testing is reduced.

“Osteoporosis now causes an estimated 2 million fractures each year and often results in immobility, pain, placement in a nursing home, isolation and other health problems—conditions and circumstances that could largely be prevented through proper bone density testing and diagnosis,” said Robert Recker, M.D., president of the National Osteoporosis Foundation. “We need Congress to pass this legislation to ensure access to these important medical tests for the 10 million individuals with osteoporosis and the 34 million individuals estimated to have low bone mass across the country.”

A 2008 study by Kaiser in Southern California found that increased use of DXA testing and osteoporosis treatment over a five-year period (2002-2006) resulted in a 37 percent reduction in hip fractures and \$30.8 million in savings in a single year in 11 Kaiser health centers. Additionally, a 2007 study completed by The Lewin Group finds that restoring DXA reimbursement to the 2006 levels will save the Medicare program \$1.14 billion over five years due to the reduced number of osteoporotic fractures.

DXA is a key tool in identifying those at risk for osteoporosis and helping those with the disease monitor their bone health. It is a recognized, reliable tool for preventing and reducing costly fractures, which account for \$18 billion in national costs of direct care and are projected to increase by 50 percent over the next two decades, reaching \$25.3 billion in 2025.

The DXA Task Force applauds Senators Lincoln and Snowe and Representatives Berkley and Burgess and all the cosponsors for introducing the “Medicare Fracture Prevention and Osteoporosis Testing Act of 2009” (S. 769 and H.R. 1894).

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National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF): Established in 1984, NOF is the nation's leading voluntary health organization solely dedicated to osteoporosis and bone health. Its mission is to prevent osteoporosis and related fractures, to promote lifelong bone health, to help improve the lives of those affected by osteoporosis, and to find a cure through programs of awareness, advocacy, public and health professional education and research. For more information on osteoporosis and bone health, contact NOF online at www.nof.org or by telephone (800) 231-4222.

American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE): AACE is a professional medical organization with more than 6,200 members in the United States and 92 other countries. Founded in 1991, AACE is dedicated to the optimal care of patients with endocrine problems. AACE clinical endocrinologists advanced, specialized training enable them to be experts in the care of endocrine disease such as diabetes, thyroid disorders, growth hormone deficiency, osteoporosis, cholesterol disorders, hypertension and obesity. For further information about AACE, visit www.aace.com.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG): The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is a medical specialty organization representing more than 45,000 physicians dedicated to improving women's healthcare.

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR): The American College of Rheumatology is an organization of and for physicians, health professionals, and scientists that advances rheumatology through programs of education, research, advocacy and practice support that foster excellence in the care of people with or at risk for arthritis and rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases. For more information on the ACR's annual meeting, see www.rheumatology.org/annual

American Society for Bone and Mineral Research (ASBMR): The ASBMR is the premier professional, scientific and medical society established to promote excellence in bone and mineral research and to facilitate the translation of that research into clinical practice. The ASBMR has a membership of nearly 4,000 physicians, basic research scientists, and clinical investigators. To learn more about the Society and the field of bone and mineral research, visit the ASBMR website at www.asbmr.org.

International Society for Clinical Densitometry (ISCD): The International Society for Clinical Densitometry is a multidisciplinary, nonprofit organization that provides a central resource for scientific disciplines with an interest in bone mass measurement. The ISCD has over 6,000 members in 56 countries with membership that spans more than 20 health disciplines including Endocrinology, Family Practice, Gynecology, Internal Medicine, Nephrology, Orthopedics, Radiology and Rheumatology.

The Endocrine Society: Founded in 1916, The Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest, and most active organization devoted to research on hormones, and the clinical practice of endocrinology. Today, The Endocrine Society's membership consists of over 14,000 scientists, physicians, educators, nurses and students in more than 80 countries. Together, these members represent all basic, applied, and clinical interests in endocrinology. The Endocrine Society is based in Chevy Chase, Maryland. To learn more about the Society, and the field of endocrinology, visit our web site at www.endo-society.org