



January 10, 2011

Glenn M. Hackbarth, J.D.
Chairman
Medicare Payment Advisory Commission
601 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Suite 9000
Washington, DC 20001

Re: December 2, 2010, MedPAC Meeting: Physician Payment Adequacy

Dear Mr. Hackbarth:

On behalf of the American College of Rheumatology, I want to commend Robert Berenson, MD, for his comment at the December 2, 2010, MedPAC meeting regarding the need to value “cognitive specialties”. The ACR looks forward to discussions with MedPAC to ensure cognitive specialties, such as rheumatology, are recognized as providers of high-valued care.

The ACR represents more than 8,000 rheumatologists and rheumatology health professionals, providing care for people with arthritis, rheumatic and musculoskeletal conditions. Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the nation and costs the federal government over \$128 billion in direct and indirect payments per year. Early access to rheumatologists and appropriate diagnosis and treatment of arthritis and related conditions can prevent disability, improve patient outcomes and quality of life, and curb skyrocketing health care costs. Rheumatologists who provide care for complex diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and ankylosing spondylitis should be recognized for providing high-valued care.

Rheumatologists and other cognitive specialists have received additional training and expertise to provide care for patients with multiple chronic conditions. CMS’ decision in the 2010 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule to eliminate payments for consultation service codes resulted in devaluing specialty care. In addition, this policy change has resulted in a decline in patient care coordination and reduced access to expert health care. Additional training and expertise by rheumatologists and cognitive specialists should be valued and recognized. Our expertise promotes the federal government’s goal of care coordination and high-quality health care.

The ACR has been working with a number of other cognitive specialties to determine possible alternative payment methods that would replace services previously billed as consultation codes and would establish a method to appropriately value cognitive specialty

care. Our organizations look forward to the opportunity to meet with MedPAC to ensure access to consultative services from cognitive specialists can continue.

Please feel free to contact ACR Director of Government Affairs, Aiken Hackett, at (404) 633-3777 or at ahackett@rheumatology.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Borenstein".

David Borenstein, MD
President, American College of Rheumatology

CC:

Robert Berenson, MD
Vice-Chair, MedPAC

Mark Miller
Executive Director, MedPAC

Christina Boccuti
MedPAC

Kevin Hayes
MedPAC

Ariel Winter
MedPAC