



The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Speaker:

The American College of Rheumatology is outraged that Congress has been unable to fix the sustainable growth rate formula – a formula that everyone agrees is flawed. The ACR represents over 7,000 rheumatologists and health professionals who treat millions of Medicare patients with rheumatic disease. Creating a power struggle to force the Senate to act on your political agenda instead of passing the temporary fix is irresponsible and hurts not only physicians and their health professional staff, but also Medicare patients who will suffer from loss of access to care. Ironically, jobs for all are in jeopardy with your inaction.

It has been reported that, “House Democratic leaders will not take up a Senate-passed six-month patch to Medicare provider payments unless the Senate moves to pass certain jobs measures.” House leaders who are concerned about passing a jobs bill seem oblivious to the pressure on physicians and health care professionals to provide appropriate quality care to our senior citizens with less reimbursement for such complex care, and the inevitable impact of job losses that will be felt in practices and clinics around the country.

Forcing physician offices to assume a 21 percent decrease in Medicare reimbursement will force physicians to stop seeing Medicare patients and cut back on office staff. This will lead to greater unemployment while the House is waiting for a “jobs bill from the Senate.” Some Medicare patients require physician monitoring to lead quality, productive lives; loss of access to care undermines efforts to sustain employment in this important group of workers. The domino effect of the House Democratic leaders’ inaction on Medicare provider payments will be devastating across the United States both on the health care system and jobs.

Without a predictable method to predict Medicare reimbursement, fluctuations in income make it impossible for small businesses like physician practices to plan for the future. Hiring more staff becomes a significant challenge. Buying equipment or expanding facilities that help the growth of the economy becomes an impossibility. Fixing the SGR will have the benefit of allowing physician practices to secure the health of our elderly population while supporting the growth of our economy.

The House of Representatives must act immediately and pass the Senate temporary fix. It is shocking that *three times* this year physicians have been subjected to anxiety and fear wondering if they could afford to treat Medicare patients and keep their offices open. Medicare patients have been informed by their physicians that it is possible they will have to find a new physician because the practice could not survive. Medicare patients will soon be without the ability to find a physician that is accepting Medicare. The ACR is now requesting that the House pass the temporary fix as soon as possible to allow rheumatologists to continue treating millions of chronically ill Americans.

Once this immediate crisis is resolved for six short months, Congress must quit placing temporary fixes on the flawed Medicare physician payment system and fix the system once and for all. Repeated delays in the payment system threaten the foundation of the American health care system and reverse the positive steps taken in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Health care reform cannot survive without physicians to treat these patients. The ACR understands that this is not an easy fix; however, a permanent solution is the only way to save Medicare. The cost to permanently fix the SGR in 2005 was \$49 billion whereas the cost today is over \$210 billion. It's not going to get any less expensive to fix this Madame Speaker, but for the future financial security of our nation and to ensure our citizens receive appropriate, quality care, Congress must fix it now.

The health care system for millions of Medicare beneficiaries is on the verge of collapse. The House must act today to delay this devastating breakdown of the American health care system. Congress must work together to finally resolve this issue. Please Madame Speaker, prevent the collapse of the health care system. Do not threaten access to health care over unnecessary political posturing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stanley B. Cohen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stanley B. Cohen, M.D.  
President, American College of Rheumatology