

November 1, 2010

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Republican Leader
U.S House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Republican Leader Boehner:

The American College of Rheumatology and the patient organizations listed below urge Congress to take action during the first week of the lame-duck session in November to avert a Medicare crisis.

We know Congress is aware that the Sustainable Growth Rate formula is flawed. The retroactive short-term patches that Congress has passed are not a sustainable solution to this problem, and cannot replace the urgent need to repeal the formula. Three times in 2010 alone, Congress has failed to avert Medicare cuts waiting days and weeks after the deadline to act, slashing payments more than 20 percent. Congress' failure to address these cuts on time resulted in unfortunate consequences for physician practices and patients.

With repeated short-term retroactive actions, some physician practices were forced to take out loans to cover payroll, others laid-off staff or delayed investments in electronic medical records. However even more critical to the failure to permanently repeal the system, some physicians were forced to stop accepting new Medicare patients, responded by seeing more patients per day or made other changes which have negatively impacted patient access to quality care.

As the 111th Congress focused their efforts to improve access to health care, Congress failed to recognize that access is unattainable without physicians and high quality care. The goal of improvement in care coordination is unachievable if physicians cannot spend necessary time with their patients. It is time Congress realizes that physicians can no longer face short term fixes and delayed payments, nor can the nation wait patiently for legislation to permanently repeal a flawed formula due to congressional deadlock. Please put politics aside this November and ensure patient care is not compromised.

Rheumatologists and our patients cannot endure the instability of temporary retroactive patches. **At a minimum, we request that Congress take legislative action that averts any scheduled cuts through 2011 to provide ample time for the physician community and Congress to develop a stable replacement to the SGR.**

The rheumatology community is uniting because we *all* deserve stability. We urge Congress to take action during the first week of the lame-duck session to prevent devastating cuts and retroactive short-term fixes.

Sincerely,

American College of Rheumatology
Arthritis Foundation
National Psoriasis Foundation
Polyarteritis Nodosa Support Network
Scleroderma Foundation
Sjögren's Syndrome Foundation
S.L.E. Lupus Foundation
Spondylitis Association of America
Vasculitis Foundation