



May 8, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Members of the U.S. Senate:

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR), representing over 9,500 rheumatologists and health professionals, has long advocated for access to affordable, high quality, high value healthcare for the more than 50 million Americans living with rheumatic diseases. The CDC recently announced that one in four adults in America live with doctor-diagnosed arthritis.

As the Senate considers **H.R. 1628**, *the American Health Care Act*, we urge you to ensure that proposals will protect and promote access to adequate and affordable health insurance for all citizens. In particular, the ACR recommends that all Americans should be covered by sufficient, affordable, and continuous health insurance that encourages high quality health care. Such high quality care would include treatment for arthritis and rheumatic diseases with access to a rheumatologist and other rheumatology health professionals for both consultative and maintenance care.

After careful deliberation the American College of Rheumatology recommends that any reform include health coverage with the following features:

- No preexisting illness exclusions.
- Affordable premiums, deductibles, and cost-sharing. High deductible plans can reduce access to medically necessary rheumatologic treatments such as biologics.
- Limitation of patient copayments, which reduce access to care and treatments.
- Caps on annual out-of-pocket patient costs, and a ban on lifetime limits on health care costs.
- Coverage allowing children to remain on their parent's insurance plan until age 26.
- Coverage for services that are exceptionally valuable to arthritis patients (e.g., biological therapies, physical and occupational therapy).
- Coverage of health educational activities for chronic arthritis patients realizing the importance of education in the management of chronic rheumatic diseases.
- Recognition of the difficulties of travel for rheumatic disease patients: laboratory, radiological services and infusion services should be conveniently available near the source of the patient's medical care.
- Continuation of the currently-required essential health benefits, in order to ensure patients have access to a robust set of health care services.

Rheumatologists and other rheumatology health professionals provide ongoing care for patients with complex chronic and acute conditions that require specialized expertise. We serve patients with serious conditions that can be difficult to diagnose and treat. Early and appropriate treatment of these especially vulnerable patients by rheumatologists can prevent or slow disease progression and decrease the likelihood of long-term disability and the costs associated with it. We therefore also recommend that health care policies should be designed to provide rheumatology patients early access to specialty care.

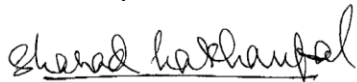
Additionally, recent workforce studies indicate a growing shortage of rheumatologists. Thus, in order to preserve patient access to care, health care policies must ensure clinical rheumatologists are able to run viable medical practices in all realms of clinical practice, including ensuring access for patients in underserved communities.

Finally, we recommend that any legislative proposals include the following provisions in order to protect patient access to timely, high quality care and treatment:

- Repeal the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) provision of the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act.
- Minimize administrative burden through universal prior authorization systems in the case of multistate insurance plans, and other actions to remove excessive administrative burdens which prevent physicians from focusing on patient care.
- Implement meaningful medical liability reform in order to reduce health care costs and preserve patient access to care.
- Maintain FDA authority to approve safe, effective biosimilars that can encourage market-based relief from the high costs of biologic arthritis drugs.

The American College of Rheumatology appreciates the opportunity to share these recommendations. We stand ready to work with you on these issues and hope that you will consider us a resource as you evaluate specific policies to ensure every American has access to affordable, high quality healthcare. Please contact Adam Cooper, Senior Director of Government Affairs, at acooper@rheumatology.org or (404) 633-3777 if you have questions or if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Sharad Lakhanpal, MBBS, MD
President, American College of Rheumatology