

Improving Access to Neurological Care

Request

We request that Congress support legislation that would allow neurologists to qualify for Medicare payment incentives, in order to improve access to these providers for people living with multiple sclerosis (MS). This legislation will correct an omission in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590), which led to the exclusion of neurology from the list of specialties eligible to receive the Medicare payment incentives. A bill to change this provision will be introduced by Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and cosponsored by Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME).

Background

MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system, which interrupts the flow of information both within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. Due to the complex and unpredictable nature of the disease, many people with MS depend on neurologists to coordinate their care and act as their primary care physicians throughout their life.

In order to ensure that individuals have appropriate access to primary care physicians, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act included a specific provision to attract more physicians to primary care specialties as increased demand is expected. Specifically, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provides a bonus to physicians who: (i) specialize in family medicine, internal medicine, geriatric medicine; pediatric medicine and (ii) have allowed charges for evaluation and management services that account for at least 60 percent of the physician's or practitioner's total allowed charges.

Most neurology practices are heavily focused on patient evaluation, management and coordination of care for those living with neurological conditions, like MS. In fact, on average, neurologists invoice 61-percent of their services as described in the second criteria leaving neurology as the only specialty that routinely coordinates care for patients that is not eligible for these incentives.

The National MS Society has long advocated for better access to the appropriate medical professionals for people living with MS. Without proper compensation, it is expected that the number of neurologists who enter the field could considerably decrease. **Thus, excluding neurologists from eligibility for the bonus payment could have long-lasting ramifications for people with neurologic conditions, including those living with MS, and leaves these patients in danger of losing important specialized care.**



Supporting Rationale

- 1 in 6 people in the United States lives with a neurologic disease.
- Over a quarter of those people living with MS depends on Medicare as their primary means of health insurance.
- A study done by ABT Associates stated that 72.2% of patients saw a neurologist for usual care of MS. Over a quarter of those with MS reported that they needed, but did not receive specialist care.
- The majority of neurologic care is provided through evaluation and management (E/M) services, also known as “cognitive care.” Cognitive care can best be described as physicians using their expertise and training to meet face-to-face with their patients to diagnose and manage their very complex chronic conditions. This is a time-intensive process, though it is not appropriately recognized in the existing reimbursement system.
- Over half of the neurologists reported that their cognitive care compensation has been reduced. Of those who were affected by the decrease in reimbursement, 50% of these neurologists said these reductions would result in reduced quality of care and 70% believed that access to care would decline.
- A recent American Academy of Neurology (AAN) survey found that a large portion of neurologists are no longer seeing new Medicare patients.