The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is pleased to present this issue of STS Advocacy Monthly, an e-newsletter with the latest and most important legislative and regulatory news relevant to cardiothoracic surgery. We hope you find it of interest. If you have comments or suggestions, please e-mail advocacy@sts.org.

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Congressional Activity Ramps Up on SGR and Global Surgical Payments
With a March 31 deadline looming, Congress has taken serious steps toward repealing Medicare's flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula.

Today the House of Representatives voted 392-37 to approve the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015, legislation that repeals the SGR. In addition, it includes the following STS priorities:

- Incentivizes the development of alternative payment models that reward physicians for providing high quality patient care and improving patient outcomes;
- Repeals the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) policy to dismantle global surgical payments and, instead, calls for a period of data collection;
- Allows qualified clinical data registries to purchase Medicare claims data for quality improvement and research efforts; and
- Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to clarify how the Common Rule for human subjects research applies to data collection in clinical registries.

The Senate is expected to vote on the bill tomorrow. The large margin of victory in the House is expected to put pressure on Senators to ensure final passage. The President has indicated that he will sign the bill when passed.

Using the Society's Legislative Action Center, take 5 minutes and send your Senators an e-mail asking them to pass S. 810 and enact Medicare payment reform that rewards physicians for providing high-quality, patient-centered care.

STS Urges Caution on ICD-10 Transition
STS has joined with dozens of medical organizations requesting that CMS take a more gradual and deliberate approach in implementing ICD-10. A joint letter urges CMS to release more detailed results from early adopter beta testing, ensure that the transition to ICD-10 does not adversely affect quality incentive programs, and work with the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology to appropriately prepare electronic health record vendors.

The Society Nominates Jeffrey Rich to MedPAC
The Society recently nominated STS Past President Jeffrey B. Rich, MD for appointment to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), an independent congressional agency that provides Congress
with analysis and policy advice on the Medicare program. Several members of Congress sent letters in support of Dr. Rich’s nomination, including Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA), Rep. Charles Boustany (R-LA), Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN), Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-VA), and Rep. Scott Rigell (R-VA). Support letters on Dr. Rich’s behalf were also submitted by former CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD (currently of The Brookings Institution), the National Quality Forum, the Partnership to Improve Patient Care, the American College of Surgeons, the National Rural Health Association, and a coalition of surgical specialties. If appointed, Dr. Rich would join MedPAC starting May 1.

**STS-PAC and Grassroots Update**

So far this year, STS advocates have contacted more than 50 members of Congress in a number of ways, including attending district meetings and visiting their DC offices. Next month, several STS members will speak directly with their representatives on Capitol Hill during the April STS Legislative Fly-In. Join your colleagues in Washington on April 20-21 to educate members of Congress on issues affecting cardiothoracic surgeons. For more information, call the STS Government Relations staff at (202) 787-1230.

The Society’s advocacy efforts are enhanced by STS member contributions to STS-PAC. Please support the only political action committee that exclusively represents cardiothoracic surgery by making a contribution today.*

**2015 STS Advocacy Priorities Selected**

The Workforce on Health Policy, Reform, and Advocacy has selected the Society’s advocacy priorities for 2015. Advocacy priorities are issues that require action from policymakers and that are likely to be relevant in the coming year. This year’s advocacy priorities include preserving global surgical payments, eliminating the SGR, promoting graduate medical education, reforming medical liability, enhancing the Society’s access to the Social Security Death Master File, and collaborating with patient advocacy organizations in support of patients with congenital heart disease. For more information, access the STS Health Policy Compendium, a collection of policy papers that summarize the Society’s positions on a number of these important issues.

*Contributions to STS-PAC are voluntary and not tax deductible for federal income tax purposes. You have the right to decline to contribute without any reprisal against your STS membership. Your contribution must be made using a credit card, check or money order, and must be drawn on a personal account to be used to support federal candidates. You must be a U.S. citizen or lawfully admitted permanent U.S. resident to contribute. Federal law requires us to use our best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation and name of employer of each individual whose contributions exceed $200 in a calendar year. Federal law prohibits STS and STS-PAC from soliciting contributions from persons outside STS's restricted class. STS's restricted class includes individuals who are dues paying members or non-dues paying members with voting rights, and who are U.S. citizens or lawfully admitted permanent U.S. residents.