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FDA Receives a Quarter Million Comments on Cigarette, Cigar Bans

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) received approximately 250,000 comments on proposed rules that would prohibit menthol in cigarettes and all flavors, other than tobacco, in cigars. Among them were comments from more than 100 medical and specialty organizations, including the Society: [cigarettes](#); [cigars](#). As part of the rulemaking process, the FDA must review all comments—but it will take some time, the agency warned. If the final rules are issued, there will be a delay of up to 2 years before they can be legally implemented and take effect. STS has a long-standing commitment to anti-tobacco efforts; more details are available at sts.org/tobaccopaper.

Fight against Medicare Cuts Remains Top Priority

“Reimbursement for cardiothoracic surgery continues to be threatened with enormous financial cuts, ranging from 5% to 10% in recent years,” writes Dr. Raymond Strobel in a policy perspective recently published in *The Annals of Thoracic Surgery*. In the article, “[The Endangered State of Medicare Reimbursement for Cardiothoracic Surgery: A Call to Action](#),” Dr. Strobel and colleagues describe the history of reimbursement for the specialty, highlight areas in need of urgent reform, propose possible solutions, and call on cardiothoracic surgeons to become involved. According to the authors, “Meaningful engagement of STS members with their elected representatives is the only way to prevent these cuts.”

In addition, the Society joined a long list of organizations in supporting a [letter to Congressional leaders](#), stating that the 2023 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Proposed Rule continues to jeopardize the financial stability of many physician and non-physician practices. The letter details end-of-year asks, which would provide “members with crucial short-term

fiscal stability while simultaneously laying the foundation for necessary long-term payment reforms.”

Also as part of the fight against cuts to Medicare reimbursement, Dr. Karen Kim wrote the op-ed, “[Medicare Cuts Threaten Surgical Care](#),” which was published in *The Detroit News* (Michigan) on August 8. For more information on becoming involved in STS advocacy efforts, read “[Advocacy 101](#)” or contact advocacy@sts.org.

Health Care Orgs Press Congress to Fix Doctor Shortage

The Society, along with more than 60 medical organizations, sent [letters to House](#) and [Senate](#) Judiciary Committee leaders, petitioning them to pass legislation that would expand the ability of international medical graduates to immediately practice in the US. The [Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act](#) (S.1810, H.R.3541) extends the authorization of the Conrad 30 program, which allows international doctors to remain in the US upon completing their residencies under the condition that they practice in areas experiencing doctor shortages. The “30” refers to the number of doctors per state that can participate in the program. Over the last 15 years, this program has brought more than 15,000 physicians to underserved areas. The legislation would extend the Conrad 30 program for 3 years, improve the process for obtaining a visa, and allow the program to be expanded beyond 30 slots if certain thresholds are met. The group called for legislators to “act expeditiously” and pass the act into law before the conclusion of the current session of Congress.

Burn Pit Legislation Signed into Law

Earlier this month, President Biden signed into law legislation that expands health care benefits for veterans who may have been exposed to toxic substances from burning trash pits on US military bases. The PACT Act—which is the largest expansion of health care benefits for veterans exposed to toxins since the Agent Orange Act of 1991—is expected to extend eligibility for medical care to roughly 3.5 million veterans. The new law allocates a projected \$280 billion over the next decade to treat ailments connected to toxic exposures and streamlines veterans’ access to such care.



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