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Advocacy Monthly



Congress Reaches Agreement to Avert Looming Medicare Cuts

Earlier this month, Congress passed legislation that mitigates a nearly 10% cut to Medicare reimbursement for the specialty that was scheduled to take effect in just 2 days. Instead, cardiothoracic surgeons will experience a phased reduction in reimbursement over the next 6 months, averaging out to a 2% cut for 2022. The goal was to eliminate 100% of the pending cuts; the Society succeeded in reducing the anticipated cuts by 80% and carved a path for future engagement with legislators. This is a critical victory for the specialty and cardiothoracic surgery patients. STS, in collaboration with the [Surgical Care Coalition](#), continues to push Congress and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for a long-term solution that does not pit physicians against each other and ensures access to care for patients across the country. For more information, contact advocacy@sts.org.

Medical Orgs Voice Concerns over Details in Lung Cancer Screening Proposal

While CMS announced in November that it believes evidence is sufficient to broaden payment for low-dose computed tomography lung cancer screening, the Society joined the GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer and American College of Radiology (ACR) in asking the agency to further adjust eligibility criteria. In [submitted comments](#), the groups urged CMS to remove its proposed decision to stop screening at age 77 and once someone has not smoked for 15 years. In March, the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) expanded the inclusion criteria for lung cancer screening, nearly doubling the number of individuals eligible for screening. STS, ACR, and GO2 had urged CMS to reopen the National Coverage Determination (NCD) and match the new screening criteria

from USPSTF. The NCD process is expected to be finalized by February 15.

STS Supports Nomination of Cardiologist to Head FDA

In a [letter to the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions](#), the Society expressed strong support for Robert M. Califf, MD, as the next commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Dr. Califf—who was FDA commissioner from 2016-17—was nominated in November by President Joe Biden. Prior to his earlier appointment, Dr. Califf, a longtime researcher, spent most of his career at Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, North Carolina, where he founded the Duke Clinical Research Institute. He recently participated in a Senate panel hearing, with a vote expected in 2022.

Dispute Resolution Process Expected to Take Effect in 2022

In [comments on the most recent surprise billing regulations](#), STS urged CMS to appropriately implement the Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) process as described in the No Surprises Act (NSA), which was passed by Congress in December 2020. The IDR process was created to help determine how much a patient's health plan must pay out-of-network providers. An Interim Final Rule on surprise billing—issued in September—spelled out how the new law will establish payments when it goes into effect on January 1. The Society also signed on to related comment letters from the [Surgical Coalition](#) and [American Medical Association](#) (AMA). The AMA and American Hospital Association, along with various institutions and physicians, recently filed litigation against the federal government over misguided implementation of the NSA. The lawsuit challenges implementation of the IDR process, which heavily favors insurers and ignores statutory requirements under the NSA.

STS 2022 Offers Advocacy Strategies and Reimbursement Tips

The [STS 58th Annual Meeting](#), taking place January 29-31, in Miami Beach, Florida, promises a rich program filled with top-quality research, new technology, expert discussion, networking, and wellness activities. In addition, special advocacy and health policy sessions include:

- **STS Advocacy: Defending Cardiothoracic Surgery and Your Patients in Washington, DC** (Monday, January 31)—Experienced advocates will share advice on how to have successful meetings with Congressional representatives and describe the impact that grassroots advocates can have on the legislative process. The Key Contact of the Year also will be awarded.
- **Health Policy Forum: Reimbursement Opportunities and Challenges** (On Demand)—This session will provide information on changes and opportunities related to the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System and cardiac surgery Bundled Payments for Care Improvement Advanced models.

Check out the [meeting program](#) for more information, and [register](#) to be “together again” with the cardiothoracic surgery community next month. A virtual option also is available.



January 29 - 31
Miami Beach, Florida

Advocacy Extras

- More than 45 organizations—including STS—signed a [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids letter](#) urging Congress to oppose the Traditional Cigar Manufacturing and Small Business Jobs Preservation Act of 2021 ([H.R. 3982](#)). This legislation would exempt some cigars, including inexpensive, machine-made cigars, and would not prohibit kid-friendly, flavored cigars from qualifying for an exemption.
- The Society sent a [letter to Congressional leaders](#), commending their introduction of the Good Samaritan Health Professional Act of 2021 ([H.R. 5239](#)). The bill offers medical liability protections to licensed health professionals who provide voluntary care in response to a federally declared disaster or national emergencies—including those independent of a formally recognized organization and who cross state lines.

- Learn more about the cuts to cardiothoracic surgery reimbursement, as well as coding changes, by attending or sending your coders, surgeons, and billing professionals to the [2022 STS Coding Workshop: Best Practices for Cardiothoracic Surgery](#). Taking place February 18-19, this 2-day virtual workshop will address new and revised codes affecting cardiothoracic surgical practices. [Register by January 7](#) for early bird rates.



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