

JANUARY 2022

# Advocacy Monthly



## No Surprises Act Took Effect January 1

The No Surprises Act—which became law earlier this month—provides patients with financial protections, shielding them from surprise medical bills. When insured patients receive emergency care, non-emergency care from out-of-network (OON) providers at in-network facilities, and air ambulance services from OON providers, surprise medical bills may result. The federal government estimates the new law will apply to approximately 10 million OON surprise medical bills a year. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has made available [resources](#) to help prepare for new administrative requirements and potential payment disputes with payers.

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## STS Pushes for Claims Data Language in Cures 2.0

In a [letter to Representatives Diana DeGette \(D-CO\) and Fred Upton \(R-MI\)](#), the Society and the American College of Cardiology requested language be added to the next iteration of [Cures 2.0](#) that would preserve Medicare Coverage with Evidence Development (CED). The language—from the [Meaningful Access to Federal Health Plan Claims Data Act of 2021](#)—would ensure that CMS could continue to use coverage policy that can expand patient access by requiring data collection after a procedure has been granted Medicare coverage. CED has been essential to bringing innovative cardiothoracic procedures and technology to the US in a timely manner, and the STS National Database and STS/ACC TVT Registry have been critical to that effort.

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## Registry-Based Reporting Is Emphasized at MedPAC Meeting

During a recent virtual meeting with the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), the Society—as part of the Registry Coalition—highlighted the benefits of registries such as the STS National Database as a tool to demonstrate quality in current Medicare payment programs like the Merit-based Incentive Payment System and Alternative Payment Models (APMs). Also discussed were the importance of registry data serving as the foundation of any innovative quality-based payment program, the incorporation of registries into new Medicare APMs, and the critical need for registries to have meaningful access to Medicare and Medicaid claims data. MedPAC is a federal agency that advises Congress on Medicare payment policy.

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## Investment in Surgical Care Coalition Pays Off

Last month, Congress passed legislation that mitigated a nearly 10% cut to Medicare reimbursement for the specialty that was scheduled to take effect on January 1. The Society—on its own and in collaboration with the Surgical Care Coalition (SCC)—succeeded in reducing the anticipated cuts by 80% and carved a path for future engagement with legislators. The SCC, of which STS is a founding member, recently reported on its 2021 multifaceted campaign designed to prevent these cuts and educate the public and policymakers about the value of surgeons. The comprehensive set of successful campaign strategies included:

- Surgeons in local and national media
- Social media posts, radio ads, and newsletter sponsorships in trade publications
- Focus group research, including message testing and development
- Member surveys
- Dynamic content amplifying surgeon and patient stories
- Grassroots engagement with members of Congress

Importantly, Dr. Joe Bavaria wrote the op-ed, “[Healthcare Is in Crisis, and Cutting Medicare Will Only Make It Worse](#),” which was published in *The Patriot News* (Pennsylvania) on September 7, 2021. In addition, Dr. Joe Dearani was featured in the SCC video, “[Cuts Will Harm an Already Strained System](#).” STS continues to work with the SCC on various advocacy issues. For more information on becoming involved in STS advocacy efforts, read “[Advocacy 101](#)” or contact [advocacy@sts.org](mailto:advocacy@sts.org).



**JOSEPH DEARANI, MD**  
Director of Pediatric and Adult Congenital Heart Surgery  
Professor of Surgery  
Mayo Clinic and Mayo College of Medicine

Surgical Care Coalition

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## Maximize Reimbursement by Attending 2022 Coding Workshop

Learn more about the cuts to cardiothoracic surgery reimbursement, as well as new and revised codes, 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 virtual workshop will feature pre-recorded online lectures and live, virtual Q&A, as well as discussion with scenario-based questions, challenging coding examples, and attendee interaction. [View the agenda and register now.](#)



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633 N. Saint Clair St., Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611  
312-202-5800



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