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Advocacy Monthly



CMS to Cut Reimbursement for CT Surgeons

The [2022 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule \(PFS\) proposed rule](#) from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)—released earlier this month—slashes reimbursement by nearly 5% for cardiothoracic surgery. This cut is on top of negative payment adjustments that CMS implemented last year during the pandemic. STS is preparing its formal comments on the rule and will continue to pursue long-term solutions to prevent this threat to the specialty—both individually and as part of the [Surgical Care Coalition \(SCC\)](#). The final rule, scheduled to go into effect on January 1, likely will be published in November.

In addition, the Society joined a long list of organizations in a [letter to Congressional leaders](#), requesting that they make a “critical investment” in the nation’s health care delivery system and maintain the 3.75% conversion factor increase for all services through at least 2022 and 2023. This change would help mitigate the cuts in the Medicare PFS.

Webinar and Conference Offer Opportunities to Learn More, Lend Your Voice

With the battle against Medicare reimbursement cuts heating up again, it is more important than ever to take action. The SCC is hosting a webinar, “[Pending Cuts to Surgical Care Are Back: How Patients Will Be Harmed by the Cuts](#),” on Wednesday, August 11, at 7:00 p.m. ET. The event will outline the pending cuts, how they will impact surgery and patients, and what actions you can take to stop them. The Society also strongly encourages you to [sign up for the STS Virtual Advocacy Conference](#) on September 28-29. For more information, contact the STS Government Relations team at advocacy@sts.org.

Virtual Advocacy Conference



September 28–29

Meet with members of Congress to
advocate for your specialty and patients.

SAVE THE DATE



Specialty Orgs Support Bill that Addresses Student Debt Burden

The Society [joined a letter](#) applauding Representatives Brian Babin (R-TX) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA) for reintroducing and supporting the [Resident Education Deferred Interest \(REDI\) Act](#). This legislation would allow borrowers to qualify for interest-free deferment on their student loans while attending a medical or dental internship or residency program. It is estimated that total student loan repayment often exceeds three times the amount borrowed. If passed, the REDI Act could save residents thousands of dollars in interest and would make options such as opening practices in underserved areas or pursuing research more attractive and affordable to residents.

PCRC Pushes for Access to Claims Data in Cures 2.0

The Physician Clinical Registry Coalition (PCRC), which includes STS, sent a [letter to Representatives Diana DeGette \(D-CO\) and Fred Upton \(R-MI\)](#) with feedback on the “discussion draft” of the 21st Century Cures 2.0 legislation. Specifically, the Coalition requested that the Cures 2.0 package include guaranteed registry access to Medicare, Medicaid, and State Children’s Health Insurance Program claims data. This access would allow registries—such as the STS National Database—to better track patient outcomes over time, expand their ability to assess the safety and effectiveness of medical treatments, and provide them with information to assess the cost-effectiveness of therapies.

STS and Advocacy Coalition Comment on IPPS, GME Slot Distribution

Following the CMS release of the 2022 Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) proposed rule, STS submitted [comments on the components of the rule](#) that may affect cardiothoracic surgery, including changes to the Medicare Severity-Diagnosis Related Groups for major chest procedures, left atrial appendage closure, short-term external heart assist device, and surgical ablation.

Also included in the IPPS proposed rule were recommendations on how to distribute the 1,000 newly created Medicare-supported residency positions included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. The Graduate Medical Education (GME) Advocacy Coalition, of which STS is a member, sent a [letter to CMS](#), urging the agency to allocate the positions in a way that ensures teaching hospitals make meaningful increases in residency programs. “We see the potential for these additional slots to help address the growing physician shortage,” the group said in the letter. The final 2022 IPPS rule, which will affect discharges occurring on or after October 1, is expected to be published next month.

Congress Must Reject Efforts to Weaken FDA Authority over Tobacco Products

STS joined more than 60 specialty organizations in signing a [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids letter](#) that strongly urges House appropriators to oppose any efforts to weaken the Food and Drug Administration's authority over cigars or any other tobacco products. The letter, which was sent as the House Committee on Appropriations was readying to mark up the [2022 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill](#), states that "all tobacco products pose risks to health and should adhere to science-based public health protections."

STS Introduces New CMS Administrator to Cardiothoracic Surgery

The Society sent a [letter to the new CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure](#), congratulating her on the new position, introducing her to the organization and specialty, and highlighting the role that the STS National Database plays in quality improvement. The letter also discussed several high priority issues such as health equity, maintaining patient access to "critical and lifesaving interventions, including cardiothoracic surgery," and avoiding cuts to Medicare reimbursement.



**The Society
of Thoracic
Surgeons**

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



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