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Advocacy Monthly



What topics would you like to read about in the next edition of *Advocacy Monthly*? The Society would like your feedback and suggestions in order to provide you with the most relevant resources and information. Please send your feedback to communications@sts.org.

Critical Legislation Targets Medicare Cuts

A bipartisan effort has been launched to avoid proposed Medicare payment cuts in 2021. Rep. Ami Bera, MD (D-CA), Rep. Larry Bucshon, MD (R-IN), and six co-sponsors have introduced legislation in the House that would avert significant reimbursement cuts to cardiothoracic surgery and other physician specialties.

Named “[Holding Providers Harmless From Medicare Cuts During COVID-19 Act of 2020](#)” (H.R. 8702), the bill would keep Medicare payment levels stable for the next 2 years, sparing cardiothoracic surgery from cuts of up to 9%. STS responded in [strong support of this legislation](#), while also joining a [letter from surgical groups](#) and [another from a broad coalition](#) of more than 70 organizations. In addition, a growing number of lawmakers, including Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT), Sen. John Boozman (R-AR), and a coalition of House members, have sent letters to Senate leaders expressing the urgency in halting these proposed cuts. Add your voice in opposition to these proposed cuts. Please [send a message to your representatives](#) requesting that they cosponsor this important legislation.

New MIPS Data Validation Plans Spark Concern

The Physician Clinical Registry Coalition, which includes STS, has sent [a letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid](#)

[Services \(CMS\)](#) arguing against a new plan to retroactively require additional data validation and auditing criteria for registries such as the STS National Database that participate in the 2020 Merit-Based Incentive Payment System (MIPS). The group reminded CMS that the agency already approved plans for the 2020 MIPS performance period and any changes would significantly burden participating groups and individuals, many of whom are experiencing unprecedented challenges due to the global pandemic.

STS Slams H-1B Rule Changes and Sharp Wage Increases

Following the Department of Labor's abrupt revamping of rules that dramatically change the H-1B program and sharply increase required wages for temporary foreign workers, [STS submitted comments](#) declaring that these new rules add substantial burdens and restrictions on hospitals, health systems, and private practices. The letter also states that if enacted, the rules may force employers to reduce employment of H-1B physicians, which could negatively impact patient outcomes and limit capacity during a pandemic. Lawsuits challenging the changes have been filed.

New CPT Code Could Help Offset COVID-Related Expenses

A new practice expense code—99072—recently was added to the American Medical Association's Current Procedural Terminology (CPT). The code is for expenses (e.g., supplies, materials, and clinical staff time) incurred as a result of the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Society joined more than 125 organizations in [sending letters to CMS as well as various insurance companies and health plans](#) urging them to implement the new CPT code, which is available for immediate reporting on claims.

Advocacy Extras

- STS submitted [comments on a proposed rule](#) for **Medicare Coverage of Innovative Technology**. The rule would establish a streamlined Medicare coverage pathway for Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved breakthrough devices, allowing national Medicare coverage to begin on the same day that a device receives FDA approval and last up to 4 years.

- The Society and more than 60 other organizations have signed onto a [letter drafted by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#) that presses the FDA to grant the pending “Citizen Petition.” This petition—originally filed in 2013—would **prohibit menthol as a “characterizing” flavor in cigarettes**. The FDA has never ruled on this petition, but is expected to respond by the end of January 2021—thus the timing of this letter.
- If you missed the live **webinar from the Surgical Care Coalition**, “[How Medicare Payment Cuts will Affect Rural Access to Surgical Care](#),” a recording is now available. The video features a panel of distinguished surgeons across various surgical specialties discussing how Medicare cuts will affect rural patients’ access to surgical care.



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