

OCTOBER 2020

# 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](mailto:communications@sts.org).

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## Fight Against Drastic Medicare Cuts Heats Up

With just a couple of months to go before Medicare reimbursement cuts are expected to take effect on January 1, the Society joined 60 organizations in signing onto a [letter that supports a 1-year budget neutrality waiver](#). The [H.R. 8505 legislation](#), if passed, would delay the cuts until 2022. Under the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) proposed Physician Fee Schedule released this summer, Medicare payments to cardiothoracic surgeons would be slashed by as much as 9%.

 **-9%** cardiac surgery

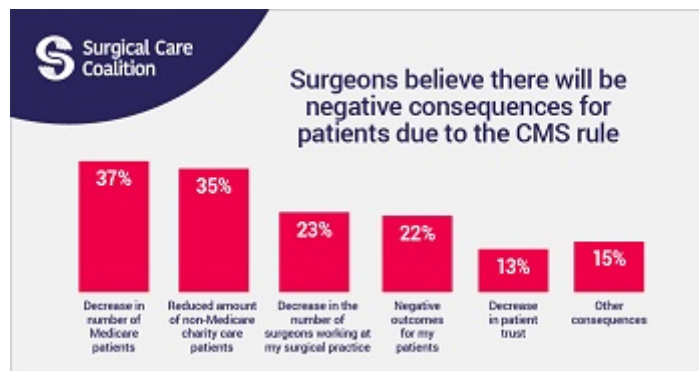
 **-8%** thoracic surgery

In addition, as a result of advocacy efforts from the Surgical Care Coalition (SCC), two previous STS Legislator of the Year award recipients, Representatives Ami Bera, MD (D-CA) and Larry Bucshon, MD (R-IN), led an effort that resulted in 229 members of Congress signing a [letter to House leaders](#), calling the situation a “matter of great urgency” and demanding immediate action against the Medicare cuts. The SCC comprises 12 surgical professional associations, including the Society, and has been actively advocating Congress to halt the Medicare cuts for almost a year. For more information on how you can help, email [advocacy@sts.org](mailto:advocacy@sts.org) or visit [sts.org/keycontact](https://sts.org/keycontact).

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## Survey Shows Serious Surgeon Concerns about Impact of Medicare Cuts

A recent SCC survey of more than 1,000 surgeon members of the American College of Surgeons (ACS) found that nearly one-third expect that they will be forced to treat fewer Medicare patients as a result of the CMS cuts. In addition, one-in-five respondents said that he/she may need to stop performing more complex procedures to reduce costs. “These CMS cuts will be devastating to patients across the country, and this survey illustrates the tough choices that all surgeons will be forced to make,” said Valerie Rusch, MD, STS member and ACS president.



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## STS Criticizes Changes Slated for QCDRs

As part of the Physician Clinical Registry Coalition, the Society submitted [comments to CMS](#) about data validation and measure testing policies for Qualified Clinical Data Registries (QCDRs) that were included in the proposed 2021 Medicare fee schedule. The Coalition expressed concerns that many of the recommended changes would impose burdensome requirements on QCDRs, including the STS National Database. The letter also states that instead of impeding the critical role that registries play in improving patient outcomes and quality of care, any revisions should incentivize and help expand the use of QCDRs and other clinical outcomes data registries. In the past year, the Coalition has shared similar concerns with CMS in several comment letters and proposals.

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## Advocacy Extras

- Dr. Keith Naunheim recently led an interactive discussion with experts in health policy, advocacy, and public relations, about how the Medicare cuts, along with the economic toll from the COVID crisis, could result in irreparable damage to surgical practices and patient care. If you missed the live webinar, “Surgical Specialties at Risk: How Medicare Cuts to Surgery Will Affect You and Your Patients,” you can [watch the video](#) or [listen to the podcast episode](#).
- The Society named Representative Diana DeGette (D-CO) [Legislator of the Year](#) in recognition of her strong leadership and fierce advocacy for health care policies that impact cardiothoracic surgeons and their patients. “We’re facing one of the worst public health crises in our nation’s history, and it’s made the work that our cardiothoracic surgeons and all of our front line health care workers do that much more important. So, thank you to them and everyone at STS for your tireless efforts to help us improve our nation’s health care system and modernize the way we care for patients” she said.



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