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Advocacy Monthly



Advocacy Conference Yields Stellar Participation, Critical Discussion

Veteran cardiothoracic surgeons and forward-thinking residents turned out for the STS Advocacy Conference this month in Washington, DC, to meet with members of Congress and legislative staff. They talked about eliminating Medicare cuts, opening access to claims data, and bolstering Medicare-sponsored residency slots. The conference enabled face-to-face time in more than 80 meetings with legislative decision makers. “The Advocacy Conference is really important for each and every one of us in STS—to get together with colleagues and discuss what is really important in our specialty and more importantly, for our patients, so that we can make health care better. The members of Congress were very receptive to our voice,” said Dr. Patrick T. Roughneen.



Fellow Texans Dr. Patrick Roughneen, Dr. Carolyn Dubeau, and STS President Dr. John Calhoon joined Brigham and Women's fellow Dr. Clauden Louis to voice issues affecting cardiothoracic surgeons across the country.

Comments Endorse Virtual Visits, Reimbursement, Multidisciplinary Follow-Up

In a [letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#) (CMS), STS and other organizations submitted comments regarding an update to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (PFS) proposed rule. The group strongly recommends that CMS allow physicians to continue to provide direct supervision of patients in cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation programs through real-time audiovisual telecommunications—presenting evidence that patients fared better when allowed access to these virtual follow-ups.

In its own [comments on the PFS proposed rule](#), STS delved into the reimbursement challenges faced by surgeons. The submission emphasized that while Medicare payments to hospitals incorporate a 2% yearly increase, payments to doctors do not—and it called on CMS to ensure that payments increase along with relative value units. The PFS final rule, scheduled to go into effect January 1, likely will be published in November.

Congress Invites Expert Feedback to Reform Value-Based Payment

In an [open letter](#) to healthcare providers, economists, finance experts, and advocacy organizations, several members of Congress—most of whom are physicians—are requesting feedback on the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act and how they can improve the Medicare payment system—without dramatic increases in spending—while ensuring that value-based care incentives fulfill their purpose. Among the authors are Drs. Ami Bera, Larry Bucshon, Kim Schrier, and Mariannette Miller-Meeks. The latter three were integral presences at the STS Advocacy Conference.

FDA Reduction of Tobacco Addictiveness Could Dramatically Reduce Harm

A proposal by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would set limits on nicotine levels in tobacco products and other combustibles that are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). STS joined a [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids letter](#) in support of implementing the rule. Because tobacco-related harms result primarily from addiction to products that repeatedly expose users to toxicity, the proposed standard would help reduce the number of “experimenters”—mainly youth—who go on to become regular smokers, and it could help current smokers quit.

STS Stands in Support of Nondiscrimination in Health Programs

STS President Dr. John Calhoon [provided comments](#) to the Office for Civil Rights and HHS in support of the CMS Nondiscrimination in Health Programs and Activities proposed rule. The rule would bolster Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act to more effectively protect people from discrimination based on demographics. Dr. Calhoon emphasized the importance of industry-accepted national standards for data collection and the application of data-driven risk models.



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