

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

STS Advocacy Monthly

February 2018

The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is pleased to present this issue of *STS Advocacy Monthly*, which features the latest and most important legislative and regulatory news relevant to cardiothoracic surgery. If you have comments or suggestions, please email advocacy@sts.org.

STS Advocacy Priorities Included in Budget Deal

On February 9, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 was signed into law. STS worked hard to help ensure that many of the Society's advocacy priorities were addressed in the bill. Notable highlights include:

- The Physician Focused Payment Model Technical Advisory Committee can now provide technical assistance to sponsors of Alternative Payment Models (APMs). STS pushed for this change so that the Society can continue its work developing APMs for cardiothoracic surgeons.
- The National Quality Forum was funded for the next 2 years. STS has [noted that the NQF's work](#) is essential to ensuring high-quality care and supporting Medicare's shift toward value-based purchasing.
- Medicare will now cover lifesaving home infusion therapies. The Society [supported this coverage](#) so that cardiac patients can continue to undergo home inotropic infusions as part of palliative, end-of-life care or as a bridge to cardiac transplantation.
- A pathway was established to secure stable funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), but additional work remains, especially since President Trump's proposed 2019 budget would roll AHRQ into the National Institutes of Health.
- Changes were made to the [Merit-Based Incentive Payment System](#) (MIPS) so that there is more flexibility in how a physician's cost score is calculated. Meaningful use requirements also were eased.
- Language that would have cut Medicare physician payments was removed from the final bill.

Mark Your Calendars! February 22 is Valve Disease Awareness Day

The second annual [National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day](#) is Thursday, February 22. STS Past President Joseph E. Bavaria, MD will be among those ringing the New York Stock Exchange closing bell to recognize the day. In addition, Alan M. Speir, MD will participate in a reception at the Inova Heart and Vascular Institute that will highlight the campaign and raise awareness about valve disease. Other STS members are expected to participate in similar events across the country. You can follow along on [Facebook](#), and join the conversation on [Twitter](#) using [#ValveDiseaseDay](#). A Twitter Chat will begin at 1:00 p.m. ET.

GME Policy Paper Updated

At the Annual Meeting last month, the Society's Board of Directors approved an updated [Policy Paper on Graduate Medical Education](#). Policy papers serve as guiding documents for STS advocates. The paper details the looming shortage of cardiothoracic surgeons and explains how the Society is working to address the issue.

STS Joins Letter on EHR Information Blocking

The Society signed onto a [Physician Clinical Registry Coalition letter](#) to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology regarding ongoing concerns about information blocking by electronic health record vendors. Although the 21st Century Cures Act included language to prevent vendors from blocking the transmission of clinical outcomes data to clinical data registries, they are continuing to do so.

Society Comments on MIPS Measures

STS [submitted comments](#) to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on MIPS Specialty Measure Sets. CMS provides specialty measure sets as a guide for physicians who are reporting their own quality measures. STS identified measures that may be inappropriate for the cardiothoracic surgery specialty.

CMS Responds to STS Comments on Device Identifiers

CMS Administrator Seema Verma [responded to comments](#) that the Society submitted in November regarding the costs to taxpayers and patients resulting from recalled and faulty medical implants. STS had [supported the OIG's recommendation](#) to include device identifiers on claims forms as one way of reducing these costs. Administrator Verma highlighted the next steps in the process.

Key Contact Connect

Welcome, New STS Key Contacts

The Society welcomed 15 new Key Contacts to the program in January, bringing the total number of grassroots advocates to 222. Just four states (Idaho, Maine, South Dakota, and Wyoming) do not yet have a Key Contact representing cardiothoracic surgery in the halls of Congress. 2018 will be a crucial year for the Society's advocacy priorities. [Get involved today!](#)