



STS Supports Curbing Prior Authorization, Safeguarding Access to Thoracic Surgery

In a letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) on behalf of the Society, STS President Dr. Thomas MacGillivray applauded CMS's proposed reform of utilization management and prior authorization (PA).

"Specifically, STS supports the proposal that Medicare Advantage plans cannot use PA as a tool to delay care, and that Medicare Advantage PA requirements should be no stricter than those of traditional Medicare," the letter explained, citing data from a recent AMA survey and a 2022 report from the Office of the Inspector General that illuminate the unnecessary burden and negative outcomes for patients associated with PA delays.

Dr. MacGillivray also expressed support for CMS-proposed updates to Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) that would specify a list of medical specialty services that PACE organizations would ensure access to. "PACE organizations are required to execute and maintain a contract with a comprehensive list of specialists including vascular and thoracic surgeons," the proposal outlined.

[Read the letter.](#)

STS Welcomes New VP of Government Relations

The STS office in Washington, D.C., recently welcomed a new Vice President of Government Relations, Derek Brandt, JD. Prior to joining STS, Brandt served as the director of congressional affairs for the American Academy of Neurology.

"I'm thrilled to join STS and look forward to collaborating with our talented member advocates and staff to represent cardiothoracic surgeons before Congress, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and many other critical government agencies," said Brandt. "Over the next year my goal is to expand STS's profile in Washington, DC, and to provide our members with more opportunities to represent their specialty before policymakers at all levels of government."



MIPS Eligible Clinicians Should Submit 2022 Data by March 31

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has opened the data submission period for Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) eligible clinicians who participated in the 2022 performance year of the Quality Payment Program (QPP). Data can be submitted and updated until **8:00 p.m. ET on March 31, 2023**. Eligible clinicians can report data directly through the [QPP site](#).

FDA Warns of Potential Risk Associated with Abbott Trifecta Valves

On February 27, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a letter informing health care providers about the potential risk of early structural valve

deterioration (SVD) with Abbott Trifecta valves, including the Trifecta Valve and the Trifecta Valve with Glide Technology (Trifecta GT).

The FDA is encouraging providers to report adverse events related to Trifecta valves to the FDA and recommends that providers monitor patients who have undergone implantation with Trifecta valves for signs and symptoms of potential SVD.

See the [FDA letter](#) and the [Abbott letter](#) for more information.

HELP Hearing Zeroes in on Workforce Shortage in Health Care

On February 16, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held their first hearing of the 118th Congress, aimed at exploring solutions to health care workforce shortages. HELP chair Senator Bernie Sanders and Ranking Member Bill Cassidy signaled that they would seriously focus on producing bi-partisan legislation to address education gaps, including expanding the Graduate Medical Education program—a policy priority of STS. [Read Chairman Sanders' opening remarks.](#)

STS Endorses Bans on Menthol Cigarettes, Flavored Cigars

As part of a coalition of more than 80 physicians' organizations, community alliances, and health outreach groups, the Society signed on to a letter expressing strong support for rules proposed by the Food and Drug Administration to prohibit the manufacture and sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars.

“While smoking rates have declined, many communities continue to experience high rates of smoking and smoking-caused disease, including people with lower levels of income and education, individuals living in rural areas, Native Americans, people with a behavioral health condition, and the LGBTQ+ community,” the coalition wrote. [Read the letter in full.](#)



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