

Access to Medical Imaging Coalition

Protecting and Preserving Access to Quality Imaging Services for our Nation's Medicare Patients

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**Contact: Deb Maggart
202.585.2764**

Access to Medical Imaging Coalition Statement on CMS Proposal to Increase Imaging Utilization Assumption Rates

AMIC Says Imaging Improves Health Outcomes, Reduces Costs; Warns that Increase in Utilization Assumption Rates Could Significantly Threaten Patient Access to Lifesaving Procedures, Particularly in Rural Areas

Washington, D.C. – The Access to Medical Imaging Coalition (AMIC) today expressed concern over the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services' recent recommendations to President Obama and Members of Congress to reduce Medicare reimbursement rates for medical imaging and radiation therapies through an increase in assumed utilization rates for outpatient imaging and radiation facilities. According to The American College of Radiology, the rate change proposed on July 1 could ultimately reduce reimbursements to lifesaving procedures such as CT, MRI, PET and radiation therapies by as much as 40%, threatening patient access to high-quality care.

“There are countless other ways – such as appropriateness criteria, accreditation and physician feedback systems – to reduce costs and ensure proper utilization of imaging and radiation therapy, without compromising patient access in the way that CMS's proposed changes will,” said Tim Trysla, executive director, Access to Medical Imaging Coalition. “CMS's recommendation to arbitrarily raise utilization assumptions are entirely unfounded, and have tremendous potential to threaten patient access to care – particularly in areas such as rural America, which is already being hit hardest by similar Medicare imaging cuts enacted by Congress in 2006.”

While the cutbacks would be felt nationwide, rural communities – where the actual imaging utilization rate is only 48% (approximately half the rate that Congress is proposing) – would be hit the hardest due to their already limited access to independent medical imaging and treatment centers. An increase in the utilization rate assumption could very well result in facility closures in these areas, forcing patients to travel farther to receive their scan, wait longer in emergency rooms and doctor offices, and experience delays in their results, all of which could lead to complications in patient care and setbacks in fighting disease.

Patients, doctors and imaging advocates met before the Congressional Rural Caucus on June 24th and held a press conference in Davenport, Iowa on July 1st to discuss the impact an increase in the utilization rate will have on rural areas and to urge Members of Congress to protect access to medical imaging. Highlights of these events can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).

CMS will accept comments on the proposed rule until August 31, and will issue a final rule by November 1, 2009

“We hope that Members of Congress and the Administration will make the right decision and choose to protect their constituents by rejecting this proposal, and instead work with organizations such as AMIC which support the adoption of physician-developed appropriateness criteria. In doing so, they will be working to ensure that all Americans have access to the high quality care they deserve, and the ability to receive the right scan at the right time,” added Trysla.

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