



Voluntary Nonprofit Home Care Association of America
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Denise Schrader
Chairman

Mary Langowski
Director

October 20, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction

The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable James E. Clyburn
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen

Members, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction

Dear Co-Chairs and Members:

On behalf of the Voluntary Nonprofit Home Care Association of America (VNHCAA), I am writing to encourage you to ensure that our nation's seniors continue to have access to affordable and high-quality care through the Medicare and Medicaid programs. As you consider options to reduce our nation's deficit, it is critically important that changes to the Medicare and Medicaid programs do not reduce beneficiary access to home health services. It is well documented that health care services furnished in the home are both cost-effective and preferred by seniors.

Unfortunately, some policymakers are now advocating the reintroduction of a copayment for home health services. Although the advocates of this change believe that it will result in more "rational" use of care, our experience demonstrates that copayment requirements will actually result in seniors deferring necessary care, ultimately resulting in greater use of care in costly settings (such as hospital emergency rooms and skilled nursing facilities). This is especially true for the seniors most often served by our member organizations, who already struggle to pay their day-to-day bills.

The VNHCAA is made up of more than 393 non-profit home care agencies, including some that have been serving their communities for over 100 years. Our members' mission is to serve as a "safety net" for our nation's most vulnerable seniors, regardless of their ability to pay. We are uniquely aware of the tenuous financial conditions facing this population, and we see the agony experienced by patients who are forced to choose between rationing medication (including breaking pills in half or taking medication every other day) and discontinuing vitally important treatments simply because they cannot afford the care prescribed by their physician. For these seniors, the imposition of copayments does not make them "more rational consumers"; instead, it could force them to abandon home health services altogether. This is evident in other programs today: Some VNHCAA providers report that up to 90% of patients utilizing Medicare Advantage plan coverage that includes home health cost-sharing decline services due to the additional cost and end up incurring costly re-hospitalizations and nursing home stays. AARP, Easter Seals and a number of other concerned organizations are on record noting that the reintroduction of a home health copayment "would place a disproportionate and damaging burden on the backs of Americans who can least afford it." We could not agree more.

Instead of asking our nation's most vulnerable seniors to bear the burden of righting Medicare, we urge you to focus on more thoughtful and targeted reforms, including initiatives to end fraud and abuse and improve quality outcomes. For instance, Senators Susan Collins and Kent Conrad and Representatives Greg Walden and Allyson Schwartz introduced legislation (S.227/H.R.2267) that would allow nurse practitioners and physician assistants to certify a Medicare patient meets the coverage requirements for home health services, fulfilling the certification requirement at a lower cost and easing administrative complications while maintaining high-quality services for beneficiaries. Moreover, program reductions that reduce access to home and community-based services for Medicaid beneficiaries could actually increase overall health system costs and keep beneficiaries from receiving care in the most preferred setting: one's own home.

Thank you for your efforts to uphold our commitment to America's seniors and the millions of beneficiaries who depend on accessible and affordable care under the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information to the Joint Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise Schrader".

Denise Schrader
Chair