September 18, 2006

The Honorable William Thomas  
Chair, House of Ways and Means  
1102 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Grassley  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Members,

The American Academy of HIV Medicine urges Members of Congress to reject a proposed 5.1% cut in payments to physicians under Medicare before Congress adjourns September 29th. Whether it is taken on as part of the revamped tax bill or as a part of some other impending legislation, it is critically important that Congress take action before the cuts take effect in January.

The American Academy of HIV Medicine represents 2000 physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners who specialize in HIV medicine, many of whom see patients through Medicare. This imbalance, with its dangerous implications for patient access to care, stems from the discrepancy between the extremely specialized work and the infamously minimal rates of reimbursement that characterize HIV medicine.

Physician compensation already represents a dire hindrance in the domestic battle against HIV/AIDS, as doctors are not making enough money to keep their practices afloat. Specific to Medicare, a significant proportion of care and treatment for people with HIV disease is performed under the Medicare delivery system. Nearly 20% of all federal spending on HIV care and treatment is expended through the Medicare program, and yet less than 2% of total HIV Medicare payments or only $360/patient annually, goes towards paying health care providers¹. For these and other reasons, fewer clinicians are choosing HIV medicine as a specialty, while the number of patients continues to grow².

These problems are systemic and not just particular to Medicare, and comprehensive reforms must be adopted. Physician payments continue to lag further behind the actual costs of practicing quality medicine; these gaps in filling vacant position and keeping clinics afloat are rapidly emerging into a crisis. In the short term, these projected cuts to physician reimbursements cannot be allowed to stand. You must take immediate steps to ensure that these are rejected before the end of the Congressional session.

Sincerely,

Jeff Schouten, M.D.  
Chair  
American Academy of HIV Medicine
