FYI...

Core Lab Memo: Change in Hemoccult Slides for Point of Care Testing - Effective Jan. 20, 2010, new hemoccult slides for fecal occult blood testing will be placed in Central Distribution. The new Hemoccult Sensa slides are recommended by the American Cancer Society and the US Preventative Services Task Force as the preferred fecal occult blood screening test for colorectal cancer. To see the entire memo, click here.

Announcements

The hospital voice messaging system will be down for scheduled maintenance from 8 - 11 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 31. The system will not be available to answer calls and take messages while the upgrade is being performed.

From the President...

This week's message is from the Legislative Action Center of the American College of Physicians.

Legislative Alert: Urge Your Senators to Act Now on a Long-term Fix to the SGR!

Congress’ window of opportunity to fix Medicare’s Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) problem is getting smaller. The 21 percent Medicare physician payment cut---that had been scheduled to take effect the first of the year---has been delayed until March 1. The SGR continues to adversely impact Medicare as well as TRICARE patients of military families as it has for the past decade. Please call your senators and push for a permanent SGR fix now. The exact details of the legislation are still being developed, but the Senate is expected to vote on the issue very soon.

Click here to call Congress now.

Recent Developments on the SGR

ACP reported in its Legislative Alert last week that an SGR fix was expected as early as Jan. 20 as part of legislation to increase the national debt limit. The Senate, however, has yet to consider that debt limit legislation, largely due to political developments over the past week.

The recent outcome of the Massachusetts Senate Special Election has left Democrats and the Administration reeling and has forced them to rethink their legislative agenda, including how to garner enough votes to pass health care reform legislation and even an SGR fix. Senate Democrats will no longer have the 60 vote super-majority needed to stop a filibuster now that Senator-elect Scott Brown, a Republican, is taking over the seat of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA). This has left Democrats scrambling as to how to proceed.

ACP is continuing to advocate for a long-term solution to the SGR. While the procedural details for
consideration of an SGR fix are still being worked out in Congress, it is expected that the Senate will take up legislation very soon, likely this week. We ask that you continue calling your senators with the following message:

- Congress must act to block the looming 21 percent fee schedule cut prior to March 1.
- This must be a permanent fix that will put the SGR to rest once and for all; temporary "patches" will no longer suffice.

Background

For more than a decade, physicians have faced perennial cuts in Medicare reimbursement due to the flawed SGR formula, which has been used to determine Medicare physician payments. On March 1, 2010, Medicare physician payments are scheduled to be cut by 21 percent. Congress has stepped in virtually every year to stop the scheduled cuts and pass short-term reprieves, thereby postponing the need to find a permanent solution to the problem and allowing the looming cuts---and the cost of eliminating them---to grow. Congress created the SGR. Congress needs to fix it.

Let your senators know you have had enough of the short-term reprieves. You have hung-on long enough patiently waiting for Congress to address the issue permanently. Let them know how the SGR hurts your patients and your practice. If you’re discouraged, say so. If you’re considering no longer accepting Medicare and TRICARE patients, say so. If you’ve stopped seeing Medicare and TRICARE patients, say so.

The House has already passed legislation providing for a long-term solution to the SGR. The Senate tried and failed in October to pass its version of legislation addressing the SGR problem. The Senate must agree with the House on legislation that can be signed into law before Mar. 1.

Advocacy Makes a Difference. Take Action Now.

Using the phone script provided, please call your senators immediately and urge them to vote "yes" on legislation to permanently repeal and replace the SGR with a better and more stable Medicare physician payment update system. Please personalize your call.

Phone calls are needed, because a Senate vote on the issue is imminent. An e-mail template is also being provided that you can send. Please personalize your e-mail.

Click here to call Congress now.

Thank you for your continued advocacy.

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Legislative Action Center