



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HEMATOLOGY

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2009

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The Honorable Senator Harry Reid
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The American Society of Hematology (ASH) strongly supports Senator Specter's amendment (No. 3163) to delay the scheduled elimination of Medicare payment for consultations which takes effect on January 1, 2010 and requests that you include the amendment in the health reform bill or a legislative vehicle expected to pass before the end of the year. ASH represents hematologists who care for Medicare patients with blood cancers and non-malignant blood disorders. As specialists and subspecialists, consultative services represent a significant portion of a hematologist's practice. These services require significant time, effort, and analysis in order to accurately diagnose the patient and develop an effective treatment plan. By removing the distinction between consultative services and other evaluation and management (E&M) services, the provision of cognitive specialty care upon which Medicare beneficiaries often rely for the treatment of complex conditions could be significantly curtailed.

In its CY 2010 final physician fee schedule rule, CMS eliminated payments for consultation codes and instructed providers to use the hospital admission codes or other applicable new and established patient E&M codes in their place. **This decision will be implemented January 1, 2010 unless Congress intervenes.**

Consultations, which typically occur when one physician requests an expert opinion or advice from another physician about a particular patient's medical condition or treatment, are an established and critical part of medical practice. Consultations are utilized by virtually all physicians to coordinate care, often for the most medically complex patients and, until now, have been recognized by virtually all payers as distinct medical services.

ASH requests that you include Senator Specter's amendment to delay implementation of consultation codes for one year in the health care reform bill or any relevant legislative vehicle expected to pass before the end of the year. During this one year period, the Secretary would be required to consult with the American Medical Association's Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Editorial Panel to modify existing consultation codes or establish new codes to accurately reflect the work of consultation services and to minimize coding errors. Such a delay will ensure that patients and providers are not negatively impacted.

Please contact Carol Schwartz, Senior Manager of Policy & Practice at (202)292-0258 or cschwartz@hematology.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hal E. Broxmeyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Hal E. Broxmeyer, Ph.D. President
cc. Senator Specter