



American Society of Clinical Oncology

**PRESIDENT**

Douglas W. Blayney, MD

**IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

Richard L. Schilsky, MD

**PRESIDENT-ELECT**

George W. Sledge, Jr., MD

**TREASURER**

Clifford Hudis, MD

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Allen S. Lichter, MD

**DIRECTORS**

Dean F. Bajorin, MD

Monica M. Bertagnolli, MD

Eduardo L. Cazap, MD

Susan L. Cohn, MD

Bruce E. Johnson, MD

Robert M. Langdon, Jr., MD

Robert S. Miller, MD

Kathleen I. Pritchard, MD

Deborah Schrag, MD, MPH

Lynn M. Schuchter, MD

Sandra M. Swain, MD

Joel Tepper, MD

Everett E. Vokes, MD

Peter P. Yu, MD

October 23, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
H-232 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), I am writing to express deep concern about a proposal to tie payment rates for health care professionals under the public insurance plan option to the payment rates adopted by the Medicare program. ASCO is the world's leading specialty society representing over 28,000 physicians who treat people with cancer and who conduct research that leads to improved patient outcomes. The core of ASCO's mission is to ensure that high quality, evidence-based care is available to all Americans in every community throughout the United States, and it is in this spirit that we write to you today.

ASCO believes strongly that every person diagnosed with cancer should have health insurance that assures access to timely, high quality care. People with cancer who are uninsured are diagnosed at a later stage and have a far greater chance of dying than those who are insured. We applaud your efforts to achieve the important goal of providing all American's with access to health care insurance.

We are concerned, however, that basing a public plan option on the current Medicare payment system would threaten patients' access to cancer care in their communities where over 80% of care is delivered. Such a plan could expand far beyond those who are currently uninsured. Many oncologists simply would be unable to participate in a plan that mirrors the Medicare system.

ASCO urges you to ensure that any public health insurance option allow for voluntary participation by providers and permit individual providers to directly negotiate fair payment levels. We believe that this is critical because current Medicare rates for cancer services – especially for the administration of chemotherapy regimens to treat cancer – are both inadequate and unstable. Medicare rates do not cover the costs of treating Medicare beneficiaries with cancer and have already caused many practices across the country to close. Extending the current Medicare platform to millions of additional patients would further jeopardize an already strained system.

2318 Mill Road, Suite 800  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
T: 571-483-1300  
F: 571-366-9530  
www.asco.org

*Making a world of difference in cancer care*



American Society of Clinical Oncology

**PRESIDENT**

Douglas W. Blayney, MD

**IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT**

Richard L. Schilsky, MD

**PRESIDENT-ELECT**

George W. Sledge, Jr., MD

**TREASURER**

Clifford Hudis, MD

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Allen S. Lichter, MD

**DIRECTORS**

Dean F. Bajorin, MD

Monica M. Bertagnolli, MD

Eduardo L. Cazap, MD

Susan L. Cohn, MD

Bruce E. Johnson, MD

Robert M. Langdon, Jr., MD

Robert S. Miller, MD

Kathleen I. Pritchard, MD

Deborah Schrag, MD, MPH

Lynn M. Schuchter, MD

Sandra M. Swain, MD

Joel Tepper, MD

Everett E. Vokes, MD

Peter P. Yu, MD

Even without resolution of the critical Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) issue under Medicare, there are unique problems with Medicare reimbursement in the area of oncology. In particular, there are additional cuts to oncology contained within the 2010 proposed physician fee schedule, including reductions for chemotherapy administration services that exceed 30% when considered in combination with other recent reductions. The adverse impacts on access to cancer care for Medicare beneficiaries will be devastating if this proposal is implemented. These problems are further compounded by the fact that many chemotherapy drugs are “underwater,” meaning that typical oncology practices are unable to purchase the drugs for the amount that they in turn are reimbursed by Medicare.

Although we greatly appreciate your leadership in finding a solution to the SGR problem, the increasing depth and uncertainty of these annual – and additional – cuts in Medicare reimbursement levels in the area of oncology is unsustainable. The dramatic reimbursement problems faced by the cancer community under Medicare threaten to create significant barriers to access to chemotherapy treatments for Medicare beneficiaries, especially for patients in rural areas and in regions with significant low income populations. Expanding this system is simply not feasible for oncology.

ASCO stands ready to assist you in achieving our shared goal – to provide all Americans with access to affordable and appropriate treatment for cancer and other diseases. We thank you for your leadership in this historic endeavor.

Sincerely,

Douglas W. Blayney, M.D.  
President, American Society of Clinical Oncology