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June 27, 2006

Betty Gould, Regulations Officer
Division of Regulatory Affairs,
Records Access and Policy Liaison
Indian Health Service
801 Thompson Avenue, Suite 450
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Re: Comments on Proposed Regulations
Regarding Medicare-Like Rates"

Dear Ms. Gould:

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) have asked us to submit comments on their behalf regarding the proposed "Medicare-like rates" regulations. They both strongly endorse these proposed regulations.

ANTHC and YKHC carry out programs of the Indian Health Service (IHS) under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, 25 U.S.C. 450 et seq. Like IHS directly operated programs and other tribal programs, they are reliant on contract health services to acquire many critical health services for their beneficiaries. In addition, ANTHC operates the

contract health services program for many other tribal health programs in Alaska. Despite the range of direct health services available in the tribal health system in Alaska, compared to many other IHS Service Areas, which are even more contract health services dependent, the need is still vastly greater than the available funding.

Contract health services funding is extremely limited, as is the IHS funding overall. Many health needs of our patients must go unmet due to the limitations in funding. These regulations impose a ceiling on the amount Medicare-participating hospitals can charge for services provided to individuals covered by IHS or tribal CHS programs or on referral from urban organizations. The amount that can be charged is based on a slightly simplified version of the rates Medicare would pay, if it were the direct payor. Coordination of benefits, restrictions on additional charges, and claims processing are also addressed. We strongly support each of these provisions.

The provisions assure that limited Federal funds are used to the greatest advantage. They will lead directly to improved access to necessary care by American Indians and Alaska Natives. Given the severe restrictions that exist with regard to access to contract health services, it does not exaggerate to say that these new regulations are likely to save some lives.

ANTHC and YKHC realize that some Medicare-participating hospitals may express concerns about having to accept Medicare-like rates for additional patient services. We believe the importance of these regulations outweighs such concerns and that Medicare rate setting has built in protections against rates that are unreasonably low.

We and our clients appreciate the effort made by the IHS and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in promulgating these regulations and look forward to their immediate implementation.

Sincerely,

SONOSKY, CHAMBERS, SACHSE,
MILLER & MUNSON, LLP



By: Myra M. Munson

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