

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 3, 2012

Hon. Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20201

Ms. Marilyn Tavenner
Acting Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, SW, Rm 314G
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius and Acting Administrator Tavenner:

We are writing to express our concern about a recent Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) contractor payment policy change that will result in less access to chronic pain management services in rural communities, and to request that the agency restore patient access to this important care.

For several years CMS has directly reimbursed Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) for essential chronic pain management services provided to Medicare beneficiaries. Despite this payment history, CMS has let stand two Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) bulletins issued in 2011 denying direct reimbursement for CRNA chronic pain management services. Not only is this payment policy change not justified, we are concerned that the result will be loss of access to chronic pain management service for many Medicare beneficiaries in rural communities.

The alternative for patients losing access to care is long-distance travel to where the care is available, costly and extensive surgery, institutionalization in a nursing home, and significant detriment to quality of life. CRNAs ensure access to anesthesia and pain management services in rural and underserved areas, and in some states, CRNAs are the sole anesthesia providers in nearly 100 percent of the rural hospitals.

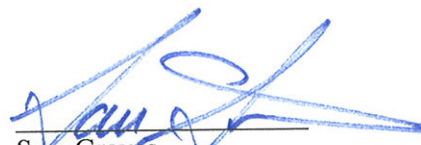
The statute and the regulation authorize Medicare reimbursement for CRNAs' "anesthesia and related care." The payment manual further states, "Payment can be made for medical or surgical services furnished by nonmedically directed CRNAs if they are allowed to furnish these services under State law ... includ(ing) ... pain management." Chronic pain management services lie within CRNA scope of practice. Nurse anesthetists providing these services have obtained specialized training in addition to their comprehensive anesthesia education, and referring physicians rely on their expertise in caring for their patients.

As you develop a proposed rule to make a consistent national policy on this issue, we ask that you restore Medicare direct reimbursement for CRNA services within their scope, and ensure a consistent Medicare payment policy that ensures patient access to these needed services.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Mike Thompson
Member of Congress


Sam Graves
Member of Congress

Adrian Smith

Adrian Smith
Member of Congress

Rubén Hinojosa

Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress

Dale E. Kildee

Dale Kildee
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Mike McIntyre

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Jerry Costello

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Jo Ann Emerson

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Randy Forbes

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