



Improve Access to Hospice in Medicare

Action Requested: Cosponsor H.R. 1284, the Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act of 2017. This legislation fixes outdated Medicare regulations so that PAs can provide hospice care to terminally-ill patients.

Background: PAs provide their patients with a wide range of medical services from birth and throughout their lives. Yet, current Medicare rules do not authorize PAs to provide, manage, or certify hospice care for their patients, even though state laws allow them to do so outside of the Medicare program. This disparity can lead to Medicare beneficiaries who are under the care of a PA being forced to endure delays in care and have to change to a different healthcare provider— a problem which is particularly urgent in light of an aging population and a looming healthcare provider shortage.

PAs are recognized along with physicians and nurse practitioners under Medicare, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and other federal healthcare programs as one of three types of primary care providers. Additionally, the 1997 Balanced Budget Act broadly authorized PAs to deliver physician medical services in Medicare as allowed under state law. PAs commonly use this authority to provide complex medical care and care coordination for Medicare beneficiaries and the dual eligible population.

Unfortunately, the former Health Care Financing Administration (and, now the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) determined that the BBA's Medicare provisions on the coverage of services provided by PAs did not apply to hospice services. As a result, PAs are not permitted to provide hospice care to beneficiaries who elect the hospice benefit. It makes no sense that Medicare beneficiaries who routinely receive full-spectrum medical care from a PA and who elect to receive the hospice benefit are not permitted to receive hospice care provided by their PA.

AAPA Legislative Recommendation: AAPA asks Congress to support the Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act (H.R. 1284), bipartisan legislation introduced by Reps. Lynn Jenkins (R-KS) and Mike Thompson (D-CA), that would permanently update Medicare to allow PAs to provide and manage hospice care for their patients, greatly enhancing access to critical end-of-life care, especially for rural Medicare patients, at a time when they are the most vulnerable.

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