

Stable healthcare requires permanent Medicare fix

The Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA) and its 8,000 physician members believe if Congress and President Obama truly want to change our nation's health care system, they should fix Medicare first. It's not too late to give the elderly, disabled and military the secure, stable health care they deserve.

To achieve this goal, the ISMA is joining with other medical societies in a campaign to first replace Medicare's payment formula, which lawmakers readily admit is fundamentally flawed.

Under that formula, physicians have faced steep Medicare cuts every year for a decade, jeopardizing their ability to make plans for their practices and care for patients. On April 14, the newest threat would reduce Medicare pay 21.2 percent; physicians could see cuts as deep as 40 percent in a few years.

Congress has legislated last-minute, short-term fixes to this problem every year for 10 years. Now we need another one. ISMA physicians want a permanent solution.

Typically, health insurers base their payment to doctors on Medicare rates. When that follows the 21.2 percent reduction, access to doctors will be threatened for all – not only seniors, the disabled and military.

We have cared for our elderly patients for many years in small, rural practices across this state. The last thing we want is to limit or close our offices to Medicare patients. Therefore, we're asking Congress for a rational Medicare physician payment formula that keeps up automatically with the cost of running a practice.

Are you – or someone you love – on Medicare or Tricare? Ask Congress to fix Medicare. We all deserve a permanent solution, not another Band-aid.

Fred Ridge, M.D.

President

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