



Contact Information:

Jessica Mikulski
1-703-535-3762
newsroom@entnet.org

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Nation's ENT Surgeons Respond to President Obama's Press Briefing Remarks on Tonsillectomy Procedures

Alexandria, Va. - The American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), which represents 12,000 ear, nose, and throat surgeons in the U.S., issued this statement today in response to remarks made by President Obama during his press briefing on July 22, 2009.

Responding to a question, President Obama said, "Part of what we want to do is to make sure that those decisions are being made by doctors and medical experts based on evidence, based on what works.... Right now, doctors a lot of times are forced to make decisions based on the fee payment schedule that's out there. ... the doctor may look at the reimbursement system and say to himself, 'You know what? I make a lot more money if I take this kid's tonsils out ... I'd rather have that doctor making those decisions based on whether you really need your kid's tonsils out, or whether ... something else would make a difference.... So part of what we want to do is to free doctors, patients, hospitals to make decisions based on what's best for patient care.'"

In reply, the AAO-HNS stated, "We, too, are in favor of evidence-based medicine that supports quality patient care. President Obama's statement highlights the complexity of medical decisions like this. However, the AAO-HNS is disappointed by the President's portrayal of the decision making processes by the physicians who perform these surgeries. In many cases, tonsillectomy may be a more effective treatment, and less costly, than prolonged or repeated treatments for an infected throat.

"For the past several years, the Academy has been developing clinical guidelines based on evidence and outcomes research, including 'Quality of Life after Tonsillectomy,' a January 2008 supplement to the journal *Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery*. We are in agreement with the President's statement that physicians, patients, and hospitals should make the decisions, based on the evidence, about what's best for patient care."

About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."

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