Dear ENT Advocacy Network Member:  

March 1, 2021

Legislative and political activity directly affects our practices and our patients. As a leading advocate for otolaryngology-head and neck surgery, we hope you enjoy reading this edition of The ENT Advocate, your premier source of advocacy information for the specialty!

Lead Story

**Senate Advances Legislation to Suspend Medicare Payment Cuts**

On March 25 the Senate passed legislation (H.R. 1868), by a vote of 90-2, to extend the 2% Medicare sequester moratorium set to expire on April 1. The amended bill provides a nine-month extension of the moratorium through December 31. The House of Representatives passed a different version of the legislation earlier this month that would both extend the moratorium through the end of the pandemic and eliminate an additional 4 percent Medicare sequester scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2022. Consequently, the House must pass the Senate language when it returns from its Spring recess in mid-April. The House is expected to vote favorably on the revised language, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced that it will suspend processing April claims until the bill is enacted into law.

The AAO-HNS thanks members of our ENT Advocacy network who responded to our "Call to Action" and raised their voice to prevent this arbitrary cut. We now turn our efforts to eliminating the 4% Medicare cut to physicians slated for next year. Stay tuned for additional calls to action on www.entadvocacy.org!

Legislative and Political Reports

**Audiology Groups Announce Joint Effort to Pass Direct Access Legislation**

The Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA), and the American Academy of Audiology (AAA) recently announced introduction of federal legislation that would grant audiologists “direct access” to Medicare patients, eliminating the long-standing physician referral requirement in current law. **H.R. 1587, the “Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act (MAASA) of 2021”** was introduced by Representatives Tom Rice (R-SC) and Matt Cartwright (D-PA) on March 3, 2021. For patient safety reasons, the AAO-HNS strongly opposes this legislation. Hearing and balance disorders are medical conditions that require a full patient history, physical examination, and medical diagnosis by an MD/DO. In addition to spearheading a physician community opposition letter, the AAO-HNS is activating a grassroots response through PROJECT 535 and updating our “Call to Action” to send pre-written messages to lawmakers. Contact the AAO-HNS Advocacy Team at govtaffairs@entnet.org for more information or to get involved.

**AAO-HNS Advocates for Prohibition of Flavored Tobacco Products**

On March 3, the AAO-HNS joined a number of physician and public health organizations in submitting a letter to Acting U.S. Food and Drug Administration Commissioner, Janet Woodcock, MD, urging prompt action by the agency to prohibit menthol cigarettes and other non-tobacco flavored tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and cigars. The letter notes that flavored products are particularly attractive to young people and
lead to increased tobacco initiation. The Academy has long advocated for banning these products and will continue to support tobacco prevention and cessation efforts.

**Senate Confirms Xavier Becerra as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services**

On March 18, Xavier Becerra was confirmed as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on a largely party-line vote. Becerra served 12 terms in Congress before his election as Attorney General of California. After his swearing in, Secretary Becerra is expected to play a central role in the Administration’s pandemic response, as well as working to advance its broader healthcare policy agenda including insurance coverage expansion and prescription drug pricing reform.

**UnitedHealthcare Announces Changes to Optum Pay**

In an effort to support more small businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering PPP loans to businesses with fewer than 20 employees and sole proprietors only now through Tuesday, March 9, 2021, at 5:00 pm (ET). Additional program changes, designed to make access to PPP loans more equitable, were recently announced as well.

**CMS Increases Medicare Payment for COVID-19 Vaccine**

On March 15, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced an increase, effective immediately, to the Medicare payment amount for administering the COVID-19 vaccine. The new payment amount of approximately $40 per administration is nearly double the amount previously reimbursed, including administration of vaccines requiring two doses. The exact payment rate for administration of each dose of a COVID-19 vaccine will depend on the type of entity that furnishes the service and will be geographically adjusted based on where the service is furnished. The updated Medicare payment rate reflects the additional resources necessary to ensure the vaccine is administered safely and appropriately. These costs are described by CPT code 99072 and are now bundled into the new COVID immunization administration payments.

**Register Now for the AAO-HNS/F 2021 Virtual Leadership Forum & BOG Spring Meeting!**

Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 17, and register for the AAO-HNS/F 2021 Virtual Leadership Forum & BOG Spring Meeting. This advocacy-based program - complimentary for Academy members - will be held from 10:00 am – 5:00 pm (ET). With the change in Administration and Congress, this one-day session will focus on their new healthcare priorities and what they mean to otolaryngologists. Speakers will share their expertise and perspectives on issues impacting your practice and patient care, as well as presentations on healthcare disparities and the COVID-19 pandemic’s near-term effects on the practice of medicine. Register here today!

**Strengthening PROJECT 535**

Given the ambitious legislative agenda for the 117th Congress, it’s more important than ever for the Academy to strengthen its “key contacts” network via PROJECT 535. In addition to the Academy’s overall advocacy efforts, PROJECT 535 volunteers help reinforce our message by establishing one-to-one relationships with federal elected officials. This additional element of constituent-based outreach amplifies our advocacy efforts when Congress debates major issues affecting the specialty. The commitment is minimal, but the impact is immense. To help further strengthen our collective advocacy efforts, sign up today or contact govtaffairs@entnet.org for more information.

Sincerely,

For more information, contact govtaffairs@entnet.org. Don't forget to bookmark *The ENT Advocate!*
Jeffrey S. Brown, MD
BOG Legislative Affairs Committee Chair
and the AAO-HNS Advocacy Team

If you no longer wish to receive important legislative and political updates via The ENT Advocate, please reply to this email with CANCEL ADVOCATE in the subject line.

*Contributions to ENT PAC are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. Contributions are voluntary, and all members of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery have the right to refuse to contribute without reprisal. Federal law prohibits ENT PAC from accepting contributions from foreign nationals. By law, if your contributions are made using a personal check or credit card, ENT PAC may use your contribution only to support candidates in federal elections. All corporate contributions to ENT PAC will be used for educational and administrative fees of ENT PAC, and other activities permissible under federal law. Federal law requires ENT PAC to use its best efforts to collect and report the name, mailing address, occupation, and the name of the employer of individuals whose contributions exceed $200 in a calendar year.

American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery
1650 Diagonal Road, Alexandria, VA 22314-2857
Phone: 1-703-836-8444 | Fax: 1-703-683-5100