



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Roundtable Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding the Medicare Physician Payment System
As prepared for delivery

Albert Einstein once said, "A great thought begins by seeing something differently, with a shift of the mind's eye."

Today, we hold our third roundtable on Medicare physician payments. We have heard from former CMS administrators and from private payers. Now we are here to see things through the eyes of those who receive the payments and provide the care – physicians.

Every year, the flawed sustainable growth rate, or SGR, leads physicians to fear dramatic reductions in their Medicare payments. Next year physicians will face a 27 percent cut if we don't act. While Congress has intervened to prevent these cuts each year, it is time we develop a permanent solution.

We need to repeal SGR and end the annual "doc fix" ritual. The year-in and year-out uncertainty is not fair to physicians or the Medicare beneficiaries who need access to their doctors.

When thinking about new ways for Medicare to pay physicians, we must focus on controlling health care spending. Physicians can help us find the solutions. They are on the front-lines of health care delivery.

Ninety-seven percent of Medicare beneficiaries see a physician at least once a year, and beneficiaries with chronic conditions see their physician at least monthly.

By ordering tests, writing prescriptions and admitting patients to hospitals, physicians are involved in up to 80 percent of total health care spending.

We need physicians to suggest changes to the Medicare physician payment system that will spur high quality, high value care.

I look to today's panelists to offer solutions, both in the short and long term. I hope, like Einstein said, that they can help us come up with a great thought by seeing something differently.

We need solutions that will work for both primary care and specialists as well. And they need to work for beneficiaries with chronic conditions. These beneficiaries account for two-thirds of total Medicare spending.

I look forward to candid and direct suggestions from our panelists on how we can begin to better control our health care spending.

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