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Cardiologists Mobilize to Protect Quality Cardiac Care for Patients

New Guarding Hearts Alliance: Heart Patients' Advocate in Congress

Ann Arbor, MI – (September 24, 2009) – Organizations representing the vast majority of cardiologists around the country have joined forces today to preserve and protect the highest quality cardiac care available in America. Guarding Hearts Alliance is advocating to protect patient access to cardiac care in whatever Medicare changes or health care reform legislation is enacted.

Cardiovascular disease is the Number One killer in America, claiming 2,400 lives each day. “That number will continue to climb if currently proposed Medicare regulations or certain provisions within health care reform legislation are implemented,” said Warren Levy, M.D.,F.A.C.C., a Virginia-based cardiologist and a spokesperson for the alliance. “We are launching the Guarding Hearts Alliance to make sure that America’s heart patients are heard in Washington. We support the intention of recently proposed Medicare regulations, but we cannot stand by as proposals are adopted that will hurt patients and their access to the highest quality cardiac care possible. Our focus is on our patients and protecting the progress we’ve made in fighting heart disease.”

Guarding Hearts Alliance Overview

The Guarding Hearts Alliance is a partnership representing more than 23,000 cardiologists who are vitally concerned about the access to quality care for more than 80 million patients suffering from heart disease. The group’s mission is to educate lawmakers and others about how proposed Medicare regulations and health care reforms could needlessly risk patient lives.

Patients concerned about their access to cardiac care being restricted in this debate should sign up to join the alliance at www.GuardingHeartsAlliance.org. Their voices will be heard clearly in October, when members of the alliance travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers about issues that could have significantly adverse affects on the nation’s fight against heart disease.

“We will advocate vigorously for heart patients,” said Cathleen Biga, president of Cardiology Advocacy Alliance, which helped create the new group. “Our comprehensive campaign includes a dynamic and interactive Website to educate the public, online advertising and awareness activities in key markets across the country.” Biga noted that the campaign will center on stories of patients who have experienced the need for access to immediate cardiac care and diagnostic equipment.



Guarding Hearts Alliance represents 23,000 cardiologists on a quest to educate current and future cardiac patients about proposed Medicare regulations and health care reforms that could reduce access to care and put lives at risk.

Hard Facts About Heart Disease

- More Americans die each year from cardiovascular disease than cancer, accidents and diabetes COMBINED.
- Each second, 37 people die from heart disease. That’s 2,400 Americans each day.
- Nearly 80 million Americans, or one in three adults, have cardiovascular disease.
- Heart-related deaths and the severity of heart-related illness have dropped 27 percent in the last decade.
- The need for cardiologists will grow 60 percent in next 15 years.

Potential Impact of Medicare and Health Care Reform Proposals

America’s cardiologists have made great advancements against heart disease, reducing heart-related deaths and the severity of heart-related illness by 27 percent during the past 10 years. The urgent need for this specialty will continue to grow by 60 percent in the next 15 years as baby boomers age.

However, proposed changes to Medicare and certain provisions in legislation before Congress threaten the advances in cardiac care that have benefited patients across the country. Guarding Hearts Alliance is fighting to ensure that patients’ safety comes first, ahead of well-intentioned but ultimately harmful changes that would reduce access to the best cardiac care possible.

Today, there are Medicare proposals that, if enacted, will have life-threatening impact on cardiac care in America. These proposed changes could:

- Limit access to in-office imaging equipment, which would delay diagnosis and add another layer between doctor and patient.
- Force cardiologists to lay off staff, close outlying offices, reduce services and limit the number of Medicare patients they treat.
- Increase health care expenses, both to the system at large from the use of more expensive testing locations and to patients, via increased patient out-of-pocket costs.

In addition, proposed amendments to some health care reform proposals could also reduce patient access to critical cardiac care.

Together, such changes would decrease access to cardiac care, particularly in rural areas, and diminish competition and choice. And they would take lifesaving tools out of the hands of trained physicians.

“The most costly heart attack is the one that could have been prevented,” said Dr. Levy. “These proposed changes will only hurt our ability to diagnose and treat patients before a heart attack strikes.”

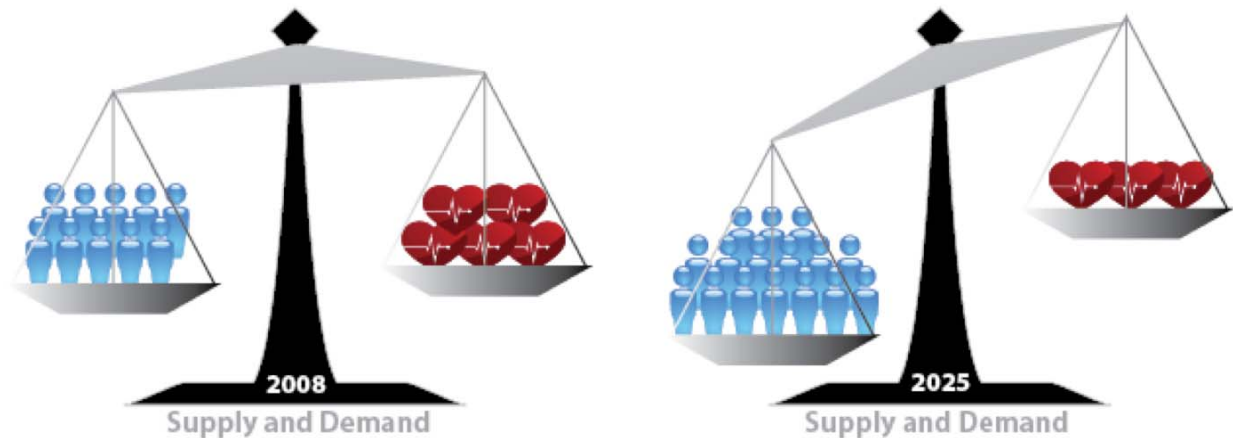
Patient-Focused Solutions

Successful treatment of patients with heart disease requires speed, access to the latest technology and access to specialized expertise. Certain changes now under consideration would cause lengthy delays in diagnosis and treatment, limit patient access to technology and, by forcing some physicians to curtail services, severely limit access to cardiac care. Guarding Hearts Alliance would like Medicare and Congress to take the time necessary to explore thoughtful and proper changes to avoid the unintended consequence of limiting access to quality cardiac care.

Patient-Focused Tenants Supported by Guarding Hearts Alliance

- **Accreditation:** Strict guidelines that ensure appropriate and cost-effective use of diagnostic equipment.
- **Certification:** Credentialing of physicians and technicians who perform and interpret diagnostic tests to ensure appropriate and high-quality care.
- **Protocols:** Evaluation criteria to guide appropriate testing.
- **Transparency:** Disclosure of physician ownership of hospitals and imaging equipment.
- **Safety:** Emergency care procedures established for physician-owned hospitals.

Future of Cardiac Care: More Patients, Fewer Doctors



Source: Cardiovascular Workforce Assessment, American College of Cardiology/The Lewin Group, March 2009 and the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates

Understanding that reform is needed, Guarding Hearts Alliance urges Medicare officials and Congress to consider measures that:

- Support strong credentialing and accreditation programs to make certain that diagnostic equipment is used properly and cost-effectively.
- Encourage the use of criteria to help physicians determine which tests are appropriate based on a patient's symptoms and medical history.
- Provide for disclosure of physician ownership in hospitals and imaging equipment to promote transparency.
- Ensure patient safety through the creation of emergency care provisions and protocols at physician-owned facilities.

Interviews with Warren Levy, Cathleen Biga and other cardiac specialists may be arranged by contacting Margo Burrage at 734-255-5659.

About Guarding Hearts Alliance

Guarding Hearts Alliance is a partnership representing more than 23,000 cardiologists across the country, all of whom are strongly in favor of Medicare regulations and health care reform initiatives that put patients first in preserving access to high-quality cardiac care. Administered through the Cardiology Advocacy Alliance, this group is vitally concerned about potential changes that could inadvertently endanger patient lives. Such issues as imaging equipment utilization and reimbursement fee schedules might sound like they would generate simple shifts in business practices, but they represent a potential threat—restricting access to lifesaving technology that serves the range of rural Medicare recipients to privately insured urban residents alike.

For more information, visit www.GuardingHeartsAlliance.org.

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