

Bipartisan lawmakers urge CMS to scrap cancer pay cuts

Large bipartisan groups of lawmakers are urging CMS to reconsider Medicare pay cuts to cancer radiation services following a lobby day by cancer doctors and patients. More than 100 lawmakers in the House signed a letter asking CMS to re-evaluate the oncologists' practice expenses, and 28 senators said CMS should include all components of the practice expense relative value units that determine payment intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) and stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT).

CMS proposed cutting pay for radiation oncology services by 19 percent at radiation therapy centers and by 15 overall, beginning January under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule. A change in the treatment times for IMRT and SBRT procedure codes is responsible for the biggest chunk of the proposed reduction. The lawmakers say they worry that CMS chose to re-evaluate only one of the many components of the practice expense relative value units. If CMS believes that the information used to establish the units for these codes is inaccurate, it should reevaluate the information for all components, the lawmakers say.

“We have heard from radiation oncologists in our states that such a cut could potentially limit cancer patients' access to radiation therapy as some cancer clinics could be forced to close, cut their staff, or put off purchasing equipment,” the letter from senators states.

The House letter similarly complains that the proposed rule would rely on patient fact sheets instead of data that can be audited. “We believe the materials cited by CMS are inappropriate for serving as the only basis for such dramatic reimbursement changes because they do not have the necessary sophistication to value complex medical procedures,” the House letter states. “These materials are designed for patient education purposes only.”

CMS is expected to publish the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule final rule on or about November 1st.