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media@surgicalcare.org

Survey: CMS Cuts Will Harm Patients by Reducing Access to Surgical Care

Cuts will force surgeons to make tough choices on patient intake and staffing

WASHINGTON, September 23, 2020 – A new survey of more than 1,000 surgeons across the country shows proposed Medicare payment cuts could result in nearly one-in-three surgeons reducing their Medicare patient intake, worsening this vulnerable population’s access to surgical care.

Nearly every surgeon will have to evaluate numerous difficult decisions if the federal government implements this rule. Surgeons that don’t plan to alter their Medicare patient intake will face other tough choices, such as reducing the amount of time spent with each patient, hiring fewer nurses and administrative staff, or stopping investments in new surgical technology.

The cuts, proposed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for calendar year 2021, will reduce surgeon payments by up to nine percent for some specialties. They are set to take effect on January 1, 2021.

“These CMS cuts will be devastating to patients across the country, and this survey illustrates the tough choices that all surgeons will be forced to make,” said Valerie Rusch, MD, FACS, President of the American College of Surgeons. “In order to ensure Medicare patients continue to have the best access to the best care – when they need it and where they need it – Congress needs to stop these cuts from taking effect.”

The survey, conducted by the American College of Surgeons, a founding member of the Surgical Care Coalition, revealed that the cuts will force surgeons to take any number of actions that will have a negative impact on their patients. One in five surgeons say they may need to stop performing certain procedures, including procedures that are especially complex or risky. This disruption in surgical care will come after patients have already faced delayed care due to COVID-19, which has made patients delay some surgical procedures. A [previous survey](#) by the [Surgical Care Coalition](#) found one-in-three private practice surgeons are already considering shutting down their practices due to the impacts of the pandemic, underscoring that this is not the time to add further uncertainty and difficulty to an already challenged healthcare system.

“The financial impact of these cuts on surgical practices will be felt by more than just patients,” L. Scott Levin, MD, FACS, Immediate Past President of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand and Vice Chair of the American College of Surgeons Board of Regents said. “Forty percent of surgeons say the Medicare cuts will result in either hiring fewer staff, hiring fewer nurses, cutting existing staff, or cutting existing nurses. The cuts will directly exacerbate the job losses seen in the medical community since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of all surgeons is to provide the highest standard of patient care, and these cuts will negatively impact the compassionate care surgeons and their staff want to provide to every patient.”

About the Surgical Care Coalition

The Surgical Care Coalition advocates for access to quality surgical care for all Americans. The Surgical Care Coalition is comprised of 12 surgical professional associations that proudly represent more than 150,000 surgeons working across the country with a common goal of improving the quality of care, and quality of life, for all patients. The founding members have worked together for nearly three decades to promote sound policy solutions to the U.S. Congress and federal regulatory agencies to solve the biggest challenges in health care.

About the American College of Surgeons

The American College of Surgeons is a scientific and educational organization of surgeons that was founded in 1913 to raise the standards of surgical practice and improve the quality of care for surgical patients. The College is dedicated to the ethical and competent practice of surgery. Its achievements have significantly influenced the course
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of scientific surgery in America and have established it as an important advocate for all surgical patients. The College has more than 82,000 members and is the largest organization of surgeons in the world. For more information, visit www.facs.org.