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# Congress Protects Patients and Delays Medicare Payment Cuts; Still More Work to Be Done

*COVID-relief package includes legislative fix equivalent to \$6 billion to ensure patient access to surgeons*

WASHINGTON, December 22, 2020 – Congress voted to protect patients' access to surgical care by delaying steep Medicare payment cuts from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that it included in the 2021 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS), according to the Surgical Care Coalition.

"Congress rightly prioritized patients by rejecting CMS's disastrous Medicare payment cuts," said John A. Wilson, MD, FAANS, FACS, President of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons. "COVID-19 has pushed our health care system to the brink, and physicians fighting on the front lines will not have this misguided policy hanging over their heads. There is still work to do to ensure patients have timely access to surgical care in 2022 and beyond, but this is a significant step in the right direction."

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, passed by Congress late Monday prevents significant Medicare cuts by increasing all Medicare payment codes by 3.75 percent for 2021 and delaying an add-on code for three years.

If Congress did not make these changes, the MPFS would cut Medicare payments to some surgical specialties by up to nine percent. The cuts were set to take effect on January 1, 2021.

"Congressional leaders recognized it is irresponsible to cut health care in the middle of a pandemic. We applaud them and our legislative champions, Sen. Boozman and Reps. Bera and Bucshon for putting patients first," said David Hoyt, MD, FACS, Executive Director of the American College of Surgeons. "The Surgical Care Coalition pledges to work with policymakers to find a sustainable fix that ensures patients will have access to quality surgical care — both during and after the pandemic."

Twelve surgical professional associations formed the Surgical Care Coalition this year to stop the Medicare physician payment cuts, formalizing an existing network that worked collectively for the past several years.

## **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.