

August 5, 2011

The Honorable Allyson Y. Schwartz
United States House of Representatives
1227 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
United States House of Representatives
2182 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Medicare Home Health Planning Improvement Act of 2011 (H.R. 2267)

Dear Congresswoman Schwartz and Congressman Walden:

The American Geriatrics Society (AGS) supports your legislation, the Medicare Home Health Planning Improvement Act of 2011, which will ensure that seniors and disabled citizens have timely access to home health services under Medicare. AGS is a national non-profit organization comprised of 6,000 health professionals, including physicians, nurses, researchers, medical educators, pharmacists, physician assistants, social workers, health care administrators, and others who specialize in geriatrics. We are the nation's largest multi-disciplinary health professional organization dedicated to improving the health, independence and quality of life of older people through initiatives in clinical practice, research and professional and public education.

As you know, this critical legislation will allow physician assistants, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and certified nurse midwives to order home health care for Medicare patients. Current law allows only physicians to certify or initiate these services. Still, these healthcare professionals are well prepared to care for complex patients with multiple co-morbidities and should be authorized to make these decisions. In fact, nurse practitioners and physician assistants are currently able to order nursing home care for Medicare beneficiaries.

Furthermore, not all seniors, especially those in medically underserved and rural areas of the country, have easy access to a primary care physician. In fact, many seniors see a nurse practitioner or physician assistant as their primary care provider. While some states have expanded their laws to allow other medical providers to order home care, Medicare will still not authorize payment for these services until a physician signs the order. In instances where Medicare beneficiaries do not have a primary care physician, they often need to schedule an extra medical visit with a provider that is not their own. Those seniors and disabled citizens who see medical professionals other than physicians as their primary care provider often need an extra office visit with an unknown physician in order to get the care they need.

Congresswoman Schwartz and Congressman Walden, AGS appreciates your leadership on this important legislation and your efforts to improve the quality of care for older Americans. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to enact the Medicare Home Health Planning Improvement Act of 2011. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me or have your staff contact Alanna Goldstein, Assistant Director of Public Affairs and Advocacy, at agoldstein@americangeriatrics.org or 212-308-1414.

Sincerely,

Barbara Resnick

Barbara Resnick, PhD, CRNP
President

Jennie Chin Hansen

Jennie Chin Hansen, RN, MS, FAAN
Chief Executive Officer