



The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

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July 28, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Fiscal Year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Appropriations Bill (S.1695)

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Ranking Member Reid:

On behalf of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS), I write to express our concern regarding the 35 percent reduction in funding for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Appropriations Bill. If AHRQ is not fully-funded, the financial loss will have a deleterious effect on current and future research as well as on the patients who would have otherwise benefitted from related medical advances. Cutting AHRQ will leave us blind at a time when policy-makers are finally putting an emphasis on quality over quantity in health care payment.

Founded in 1964, STS is an international not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,000 cardiothoracic surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals in 90 countries who are dedicated to ensuring the best surgical care for patients with diseases of the heart, lungs, and other organs in the chest. The mission of the Society is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.

Recent proposed cuts to AHRQ in the Senate Labor-HHS bill, and a complete elimination of AHRQ with proposed cuts of \$100 million to the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) in the House version (H.R. 3020), will stifle innovation and jeopardize progress in the practice of medicine. AHRQ's mission is, "[t]o produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable," and many STS members who receive AHRQ and/or PCORI grants are currently undertaking research that will transform the practice of cardiothoracic surgery [See Appendix]. These studies evaluate treatment effectiveness, optimize patient outcomes, and improve the patient experience. In addition, they will enable patients to make informed decisions about their health care needs when their providers are equipped with a greater knowledge of treatment efficacy. Without AHRQ funding for health services research, our ability to understand the impact of various treatments in different patient populations will be

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severely diminished, and the pathway to advances in health care will disappear.

I hope you will ensure that AHRQ remains fully-funded at \$364 million in FY 2016. Should you have any further questions or if you would like to discuss this issue further, please contact Courtney Yohe, Director of STS Government Relations at 202-787-1222, or by e-mail cyohe@sts.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark S. Allen".

Mark S. Allen, MD
President

Appendix



SOCIETY OF THORACIC SURGEONS
Task Force on Longitudinal Follow-up and Linked Registries (LRLR)
Summary of Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) initiatives

I. Funded Grants

1. Period of Award: 10/01/2013 – 09/30/2017
AHRQ R01 Grant
Title of Project: Optimizing Prevention of Healthcare-Acquired Infections After Cardiac Surgery
Grant Number: 1R01HS022535-01 REVISED
Granting Agency: The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Total Costs: \$1,499,858
Principal Investigator: Donald S. Likosky, PhD
STS Principal Investigator: Richard Prager, MD
Co-Investigators: James Bagian, Richard Prager, Carol Chenoweth, Sarah Krein, Sara Pasquali, Min Zhang

2. Period of Award: 08/01/2014 - 07/31/2018
AHRQ R01 Grant
Title of Project: National Longitudinal Outcomes Following Surgical Therapy for Lung Cancer
Grant Number: R01HS022279
Granting Agency: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)
Total Costs: \$954,028
Principal Investigator: Felix Fernandez
Co-Investigators: Joe B Putnam, Anthony Furnary, Andrzej Kosinski, Mark Onaitis, Patricia Cowper, Cam Wright, Dan Boffa, Ed Levitt, Jeffrey P. Jacobs

3. Period of Award: 07/01/2010 – 07/31/2015
AHRQ R18 Grant
Title of Project: Cardiac Surgery Outcomes: Comparing the Comprehensive Unit-Based Safety Program (CUSP) and Translating Evidence into Practice (TRIP) to Passive Reporting
Grant Number: R18 5R18HS019934-03
Granting Agency: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)
Total Budget:
Principal Investigator: Peter Pronovost, MD, PhD
STS PI: NA
Co-Investigators: Duke Cameron, MD; David Thompson, DNSc; Jill Marsteller, PhD
STS's role: To provide Johns Hopkins University with access to data from the STS National Database. DCRI is the data analytic center

4. Period of Award 05/01/2014 – 04/30/2017
PCORI Award
Title of Project: Optimizing health Outcomes in Patients with Symptomatic Aortic Valve Disease
Contract Number: CER-1306-04350

Granting Agency: Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)

Total Costs: \$1,913,609.80

Principal Investigator: **J. Matthew Brennan, MD MPH**

STS Principal Investigator: **Fred H. Edwards, MD**

Co-Investigators: Eric Peterson, MD, MPH, Daniel Mark, MD, Gillian Schmidler, MD, Sean O'Brien, PHD, Roland Matsouaka, PhD

5. Period of award : 07/01/14-06/30/17

Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute: R-APD-1306-00727

Title of Project: Improving the effectiveness of routine surveillance following lung cancer resection.

Principal Investigator - Benjamin Kozower (Budget = \$1,760,000)

Co-investigators: George Stukenborg, Tim McMurry, Robert Volk, Caprice Greenberg, George Chang

II. Projects in Development

6. **National Study of Safety and Quality of Surgical Therapy for Esophageal Cancer**

Principal Investigator: Daniel J. Boffa, MD

Co-Investigators: Mark Onaitis, MD; Felix Fernandez, MD MSc; Benjamin Kozower MD MPH; Cameron Wright, MD; Jeffrey P. Jacobs, MD; Eric Grogan MD MPH; Farhood Farjah MD

Status: submitted for AHRQ R01 grant on 06.05.2015

7. **Population-Based Longitudinal Outcome Comparison of Bioprosthetic versus Mechanical Aortic Valve Replacement in Patients Under 65 Years of Age**

Principal investigators: Danny Chu, MD and Vinay Badhwar, MD

Co-investigators: Jeffrey Jacobs, MD, David Shahian, MD, Fred Edwards, MD, Vinod Thourani, MD, John Puskas, MD, Matthew Brennan, MD, Sean O'Brien, PhD

Status: In grant development. Proposes to link to the Healthcare Costs and Utilization Project (HCUP) Database maintained by the AHRQ

8. **Understanding Quality and Costs in Adult Heart Surgery**

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey P Jacobs

Co-Investigators: David Shahian, Sean O'Brien Rich Prager, Fred Edwards, Fred Grover, Sara Pasquali, Marshall L. Jacobs, John E. Mayer, Vinay Badhwar

Status: In grant development.