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The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is pleased to present this issue of *STS Advocacy Monthly*, an e-newsletter with the latest and most important legislative and regulatory news relevant to cardiothoracic surgery. If you have comments or suggestions, please e-mail advocacy@sts.org.

STS Testifies Before CMS on Global Surgical Payments

Francis C. Nichols, MD, Chair of the STS Workforce on Coding and Reimbursement, recently testified at a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) forum on the agency's proposal to [collect data for 10- and 90-day global services](#) from *all* physicians. This proposal contradicts a section of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) that requires CMS to collect only a representative *sample*.

Dr. Nichols explained that the proposed plan would create undue administrative and financial burdens on physicians and their staffs and have deleterious effects on patient care, with relatively little benefit to actual payment accuracy.

STS continues working with congressional leaders to fight this proposal. In particular, Reps. Larry Bucshon, MD (R-IN) and Ami Bera, MD (D-CA) are leading a congressional sign-on letter asking CMS to reverse its current position on global surgical payments. E-mail advocacy@sts.org to learn how you can get involved in this important issue.

Society Comments on Episode Groups, Payment Rule, Patient Relationships

STS recently submitted comment letters to CMS that:

- Identified problematic issues with the methodology that the agency used to [develop episode groups](#) for measuring and comparing physician resource use in treating Medicare patients;
- [Praised and criticized policies](#) in the Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment and Ambulatory Surgical Center Payment Systems Proposed Rule. Although the Society supported the proposed change in the tolerance limit for patient and graft survival after organ transplants, as well as the definition of "eligible death," it strongly opposed the proposed reduction in reimbursement for lung cancer screening; and
- Provided feedback on [proposed physician-patient relationship categories](#), which are intended to more accurately attribute resource use to individual physicians for patient care. STS urged a gradual, transparent implementation of these categories that balances the need for administrative simplicity with clinical accuracy.

STS Joins Letters on Claims Data Access, Refinement Panel Appeals, 21st Century Cures

The Society recently signed multiorganizational letters that:

- Responded to a final CMS rule regulating access to Medicare claims data. MACRA directs CMS to provide qualified clinical data registries, such as the STS National Database, with long-term, continuous, and timely access to these data, but the final rule permits only limited access;

- Asked CMS to [restore the Refinement Panel appeals process](#) for adjudicating the agency's decisions regarding misvalued codes; and
- [Thanked House Speaker Paul Ryan](#) for his stated commitment to proceed with a 21st Century Cures bill in the fall. The bill is intended to accelerate innovation, boost research efforts, streamline drug and device approvals, and enhance health information technology interoperability.

Key Contact Connect

Join STS on Capitol Hill October 17

The Society invites you to join Drs. Joseph E. Bavaria, Keith S. Naunheim, Richard L. Prager, Joseph F. Sabik, and other STS surgeon leaders at the next [STS Legislative Fly-In](#), October 17, in Washington, DC. When decision makers sit down with physicians from their home districts, they listen. Two previous participants highly recommend the event:

- **Cris Alvarado, MD:** "I would strongly encourage all STS members to consider participating in a Legislative Fly-In. The trip is extremely well organized and makes very effective use of time to generate the most results. I was very pleasantly surprised at how engaged our legislators can be when we meet them face to face! We surgeons need to be our own advocates."
- **Erin Gillaspie, MD:** "During my time in Washington, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of current political issues as they pertain to medicine as a whole and, in particular, our specialty. I enjoyed interacting with and learning from leaders within STS and the field of thoracic surgery. The trip was capped off with the incredible experience of visiting Capitol Hill to meet with representatives and their health care teams."

Register today by e-mailing advocacy@sts.org. In addition, four scholarships are available to cover reasonable travel and meal expenses (1 day/1 hotel night). Send your [completed application](#), along with your CV, to advocacy@sts.org by Friday, September 2.