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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 Secures Critical Provision in 21st Century Cures Act

The ambitious 21st Century Cures Act was signed into law on December 13 after spending more than 2 years in political limbo. STS supported the bill, sending [letters to House](#) and [Senate leaders](#), as well as signing on to Physician Clinical Registry Coalition [comments to the House](#) and [Senate](#).

The goal of the legislation, worth an estimated \$6.3 billion, is to accelerate the pace of medical innovation by increasing funding for the National Institutes of Health, streamlining Food and Drug Administration pathways for drug and device approvals, and enhancing interoperability of health information technology. A key aspect of the law is language adopting a statutory definition of a “clinician-led clinical data registry,” which was drafted by STS staff and surgeon leaders. Among other things, this important provision prevents electronic health record software vendors from blocking registries’ access to data.

CMS Issues Final Rule on Bundled Payments for CABG

On December 20, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a Final Rule implementing a [mandatory bundled payment](#) for coronary artery bypass grafting surgery in certain areas of the country, starting in July 2017. In the Final Rule, the risk-sharing aspect of the program has been delayed until January 2019; however, participants who would like to receive Alternative Payment Model credit can opt in to start bearing risk in 2018. Additionally, the quality measure component has been updated to align with the Society’s quality improvement initiatives using the STS National Database. STS will continue to work with CMS on this program, particularly as the new administration takes office in January.

STS Congratulates Rep. Tom Price

The Society has [sent a letter](#) to Congressman Tom Price, MD, of Georgia congratulating him on his nomination as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Rep. Price, an orthopedic surgeon, has supported the Society’s push for evidence-based health care reforms that improve care quality while lowering costs. STS intends to help Rep. Price achieve these reforms if he is confirmed as Secretary.

Society Joins Letters on Lung Cancer Screening, Registry Regulations

STS recently signed multiorganizational letters that:

- Expressed opposition to [cuts in lung cancer screening reimbursement](#) included in the 2017 Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System Final Rule. These cuts may hinder patient access to life-saving screening procedures, with a disproportionate impact on low-income and rural areas, and undermine the overarching battle against lung cancer.
- Thanked CMS for [addressing several concerns](#) about the role clinical data registries will play in the new Merit-Based Incentive Payment System; however, the letter noted that significant remaining concerns were either rejected or ignored in the [Final Rule](#).

Patient Relationship Categories List Available

CMS recently posted revised [physician-patient relationship categories](#) that eventually will be used to more accurately attribute resource use to individual physicians for patient care. This past summer, STS responded to an earlier version of the categories by [urging a gradual, transparent implementation](#) that

balances the need for administrative simplicity with clinical accuracy. The Society will review the newly posted categories and provide additional feedback to CMS.

STS Joins Coalition on CMMI

The Society recently joined Healthcare Leaders for Accountable Innovation in Medicare, a new coalition hosted by the Healthcare Leadership Council that will focus on activities of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI). CMMI provides a robust research platform to evaluate new payment and delivery approaches. STS will help the coalition with the shared goal of achieving high-quality and high-value health care.

Valve Disease Awareness Day Approved

February 22 will now officially be recognized as “[National Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day](#).” The Alliance for Aging Research, STS, and other organizations successfully [urged the creation](#) of this national health observance to raise awareness of a disease that affects more than 5 million Americans and kills more than 22,000 people each year in the US. A new website, www.valvediseaseday.org, will help share important information about valve disease with patients and their families.

Key Contact Connect

Learn Advocacy Tips at the STS Annual Meeting

The [STS 53rd Annual Meeting](#) will have a new session just for Key Contacts on Monday, January 23, 2017, at 11:30 a.m. STS Key Contacts: How to Become an Advocate for Cardiothoracic Surgery is the perfect session for anyone who would like to gain experience advocating for the specialty. Key Contacts will share best practices and tips, and there will be awards for the hard work that Key Contacts do throughout the year. If you haven't already, make sure to [register for the Annual Meeting and reserve your housing](#).