

September 2017

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 Releases Statement on Graham-Cassidy Bill

As members of the Senate recently considered the Graham-Cassidy bill, the Society issued a statement [urging them to ensure that patient access to high-quality health care is a priority](#) in any health care reform measure. The statement said that legislation, like the Graham-Cassidy bill, would limit patients' access to evidence-based, comprehensive health care coverage and would have dire consequences on patient care and outcomes if passed by Congress. STS asked that Senators work through regular order to advance reforms that align with the Society's Health Reform Priorities. The Senate later decided not to vote on the Graham-Cassidy bill.

Society Joins Letters on NQF Funding, Pediatric Subspecialty Loan Repayment

STS recently signed two multiorganizational letters that:

- Supported [reauthorization of the National Quality Forum](#) (NQF), noting that the NQF's work is essential to ensure high-quality care and support Medicare's shift toward value-based purchasing; and
- Endorsed the Ensuring Children's Access to Specialty Care Act of 2017, which would amend the National Health Service Corps loan repayment program so that pediatric subspecialists could qualify.

STS Comments on Physician Fee Schedule, CABG Model Cancellation, Heart Allocation

- The Society recently submitted comments to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding a proposed rule on 2018 Updates to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule. The comments [addressed several aspects of the proposed rule](#), including malpractice Relative Value Units (RVUs), proposed valuations of specific codes such as tracheostomy, artificial heart system procedures, and esophagectomy, appropriate use criteria for advanced diagnostic imaging services, and patient relationship codes. CMS is expected to release the final rule in November.
- STS also sent comments to CMS Administrator Seema Verma [expressing support for the cancellation](#) of the Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Episode Payment Model and offering to work together on developing value-based payment models. STS had previously submitted comments [objecting to the model's design](#), which ignores the cost savings that could be achieved by combining clinical information from the STS National Database with claims data.
- Finally, the Society submitted comments to the OPTN/UNOS Thoracic Organ Transplantation Committee [supporting a guidance document](#) that outlines how to handle requests for exceptions from the new adult heart allocation system. Adult patients with congenital heart disease may have clinical circumstances that would benefit from such exceptions.

Learn about Value-Based Payment with VCSQI

Cardiothoracic surgery practices and hospitals interested in learning more about making a successful transition to value-based payment should be aware of the Virginia Cardiac Services Quality Initiative

(VCSQI). VCSQI has secured a federal grant to provide resources and support for those clinical practices that are seeking to make this transition and achieve high-quality, efficient, and patient-centered care. For more information, contact Deborah M. Nadzam, Project Director, Virginia Cardiac Services Quality Initiative Support and Alignment Network (VCSQI SAN 2.0), at debnadzam@gmail.com or (440) 785-9657.

Key Contact Connect

Check Up with Congress Call Rescheduled to October 2

The next installment in the Society's series of conference calls with lawmakers in Washington will be held this Monday, October 2, at 6:00 p.m. ET (rescheduled from Wednesday, September 13). Hear from Rep. Ami Bera, MD (D-CA), who earned an STS Legislator of the Year award for his efforts to help preserve global surgical payments. Dr. Bera will describe his work in Congress and share why it's important to support STS-PAC. [Sign up for the call today.](#)

Attend the Fall Legislative Fly-In

Join your colleagues in Washington, DC, for the Society's next [Legislative Fly-In](#), November 1-2. When surgeons speak, Congress listens. A dinner briefing will be held on Wednesday, November 1, followed by breakfast and Capitol Hill meetings the next day that will be customized for each participant. To secure your spot, e-mail Madeleine Stirling at mstirling@sts.org.

Plan an In-District Advocacy Meeting

If you can't make the Fly-In but still want to meet your members of Congress, let the STS Government Relations team set up a convenient meeting in your district. Here's what STS members who participated in such meetings this summer said about the experience:

- **HelenMari Merritt, DO on meeting Rep. Don Bacon's (R-NE) staffer:** "I felt the meeting was productive and a good exchange of ideas. We will follow up with [the staffer] regarding some particulars of the discussion and have extended an invitation to our simulation training session for residents on November 1, with a hospital tour to follow."
- **Charles Harr, MD on meeting Rep. George Holding (R-NC):** "I thoroughly enjoyed my visit. We discussed the need for additional residency training slots. His sister-in-law is a pediatrician and has been encouraging him to support that legislation. We also discussed physician ownership of health care delivery facilities. I appreciated the opportunity to represent STS."

Contact Madeleine Stirling at mstirling@sts.org to get started.