
September 14, 2011



The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
129 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515



The Honorable Patty Murray
Co-Chair, Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Hensarling, Senator Murray, and Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction:



As leaders of national, non-profit organizations involved in the regulation of the medical profession, we are dedicated to improving the quality of health care, and we thank you for serving on the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. Your efforts to address the nation's fiscal challenges are appreciated.



As you engage in your deliberations, we wish to express our concern that the Obama Administration and Congress continue to contemplate reducing Medicare's Graduate Medical Education (GME) funding as part of a larger, long-term deficit reduction package. Medicare GME supports the training of physicians, and also helps assure that teaching hospitals can provide a dynamic teaching venue for other health professionals. A reduction in support could put our societal commitments at risk—adversely affecting access to qualified physicians and health care services.



We look forward to working with the Obama Administration and Congressional leaders to develop and implement a workforce strategy that takes into account all the forces leading us to physician shortages. Such a strategy must be built on evidence-based health care provider workforce analyses, which several of us are working on with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), state medical and osteopathic boards and other medical professional organizations, to gain a more comprehensive assessment of our future workforce needs, looking specifically at geographic and practice area shortages.



While we recognize our national fiscal challenges, and the tough choices our leaders face as they work to reduce the deficit, we are concerned that proposed reductions in Medicare's support for GME would threaten our nation's supply of well-trained physicians and nurses, destabilize the system of physician training, and impede access to care. With the U.S. already facing a physician shortage that will continue to grow by 2020, any reduction in GME funding would jeopardize the ability of residency training programs, and the institutions that sponsor them, to produce physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals with the skills needed to achieve a high-functioning and efficient delivery system as well as skills associated with quality measurement and improvement, evidence-based medicine, working in multidisciplinary teams, care coordination, and the use of health information technology.



The Medicare program has the responsibility to ensure that GME funding is being used to meet educational standards and outcomes that can improve the value of our health care delivery system. For this reason, we are engaged in the identification of specific benchmarks of knowledge and skill that physicians in every specialty must achieve at every stage of medical education and practice. These benchmarks of achieving skills and knowledge will document the steadily increasing mastery of the core competencies essential to the future functioning of physicians. A drastic reduction in GME funding will disrupt our ability to carry out our commitment to creating an outcome-oriented, value-based medical education process.

It is imperative that Medicare's support for GME be maintained in order to ensure that patients across the country have access to a qualified health care workforce and to high-quality health care. A reduction in GME would not just affect training programs. It would adversely affect the scores of medical centers across the country that depend on the trainees. In turn, this would compromise our nation's ability to provide quality medical care for all.

Sincerely,

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)

American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)

American Osteopathic Association (AOA)

Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)

Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG)

Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB)

National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME)

National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners (NBOME)

cc: The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen