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MAG PRESIDENT SAYS UNSUSTAINABLE MEDICARE FORMULA HIGHLIGHTS RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH EXPANDED GOVERNMENT HEALTH CARE ROLE

ATLANTA – Gary C. Richter, M.D., the president of the Medical Association of Georgia (MAG), says the fact that Congressional leaders have failed to address the 21 percent cut in Medicare pay for physicians that is scheduled to go into effect today highlights why much of the health care reform legislation that has been proposed at the federal level is fundamentally flawed.

“Physicians are already operating at a deficit when it comes to Medicare, so this cut is going to have disastrous results in terms of the access our patients have to medical care,” Dr. Richter says. “Physicians simply will not be able to afford to see Medicare patients as a practical economic matter.”

The Atlanta-based gastroenterologist adds that, “We shouldn’t be talking about an expanded government health care role when the Medicare program we have isn’t sustainable. Can you imagine the financial implications of extending this kind of approach into other government-run health care programs?”

He is calling on patients and physicians to contact their Congressional leaders to urge them to repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) – which serves as the basis for Medicare payment for physicians – and replace that with a system that is tied to the Medicare Economic Index.

Dr. Richter says, “The Medicare crisis provides clear and convincing evidence that efforts to enhance our health care system should be focused on the patient-physician relationship and reforming the medical payment system.”

He believes that patients and doctors should ultimately determine the value of medical services – not the government or other third parties – stressing that, “We can’t truly reform the health care system until patients and physicians have the right to privately contract.”

Dr. Richer concludes that, “Adequately funding Medicare comes down the government fulfilling the promise it made to American seniors when it instituted the program in 1964...attempting to shift the burden to physicians is both transparent and irresponsible.”

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