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June 17, 2009

The Honorable Joseph Crowley  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: "Oncology Care Quality Improvement Program of 2009"

Dear Representative Crowley:

On behalf of the patients we represent, National Patient Advocate Foundation is pleased to offer its strong support for the "Oncology Care Quality Improvement Program of 2009." This legislation will establish a pilot program allowing the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to evaluate the impact of three provider-led approaches to improve care quality and outcomes for Medicare beneficiaries with cancer while addressing cost drivers by creating greater efficiencies in the program.

As you know, National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving access to healthcare services through policy reform. The advocacy activities of NPAF are informed and influenced by the experience of patients who receive case management services from our companion organization, Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF). Last year, PAF received more than 9.5 million inquiries from patients throughout the United States seeking assistance for access to care issues resulting from diagnoses of a chronic, debilitating or life-threatening disease. Of those, 48,369 became full patient cases involving communications made by PAF staff on behalf of a patient in order to reach positive resolution. Last year, approximately 23% of patients contacting PAF were covered by Medicare; almost 71% of those individuals had a cancer diagnosis.

National Patient Advocate Foundation is pleased that the legislation calls for adherence to evidence-based guidelines which will reduce variation in care and help physicians make clinical decisions with evidence of proven treatment regimens. Our healthcare system should support and adhere to medical guidelines that are independently developed by disease specialists. When assisting patients, senior navigators at Patient Advocate Foundation frequently cite medical guidelines when successfully appealing to insurance companies that have denied a particular treatment protocol. Widespread adoption and utilization of medical guidelines will help reduce errors and assist physicians make clinical decisions based on evidence resulting in improved patient outcomes and value.

In addition, NPAF supports patient education and care coordination services which are included in this legislation. Cancer patients who receive education about their diagnosis and treatment often avoid and/or address issues that may otherwise result in unnecessary hospitalizations. An adequate medical workforce as well as appropriate reimbursement are critical in order for education and care coordination to have a meaningful impact on patients and our health care system.

Finally, NPAF believes that end-of-life planning and counseling services will advantage patients and the quality of our health care system because patients will clearly understand their risks and options. Allowing for death with dignity that is free of pain will help improve the quality of life for patients in their final months and minimize health care spending in the final year of life which currently consumes 27% of Medicare spending.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of patients. NPAF will continue to watch with interest the movement of this important legislation through the United States Congress. If you have questions, or if we may provide you with additional information, please feel free to contact Grayson Fowler or Amy Boivin at 202-347-8009.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Davenport-Ennis". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Nancy Davenport-Ennis  
President & CEO