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The Patient's Voice | *since 1996*

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The Honorable Mary Landrieu  
United States Senate  
724 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

April 25, 2008

Re: Comprehensive Cancer Care Improvement Act of 2008

Dear Senator Landrieu:

On behalf of the millions of patients we serve, National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF) is proud to support the Comprehensive Cancer Care Improvement Act of 2008 (S. 2790). As you may know, the National Patient Advocate Foundation (NPAF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving access to health care services through policy reform. The advocacy activities of NPAF are informed and influenced by the experience of patients who receive counseling and case management services from our companion organization, the Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF). Last year, PAF received approximately 6.8 million contacts for information or service 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, 44,572 became full patient cases involving communication made by PAF staff on behalf of a patient in order to reach positive resolution.

We are very pleased to see the introduction of the Comprehensive Cancer Care Improvement Act of 2008 and we commend your efforts on behalf of cancer patients. NPAF believes that comprehensive cancer care planning will assist patients from the point at which they are diagnosed with cancer, through treatment and recovery. The bill's emphasis on the development of treatment plans, cancer care summaries and follow-up plans will help to ensure that patients understand the treatment options that are available to them as they navigate the complexities of cancer care management, and as they move forward to recovery, and to understand the follow-up care that will be essential to their continued health. These plans will empower patients as health care consumers, providing them with tools to be active participants in their care. These plans will also assist in coordinating care, helping patients to anticipate care that is recommended once active treatment has concluded. This coordination of care will reduce redundancies in diagnostic testing and duplication of dollars expended through the health care system for duplicate care. It is NPAF's contention that with this type of planning, the resources allocated to cancer care management will be enhanced, while the quality of care will be more consistent and targeted.

NPAF also commends your efforts to improve pain and symptom management care, and to strengthen palliative care services through the provision of grants, encouragement of provider education and implementation of a Medicare hospice demonstration project. The symptom management programs that will be supported by the bill will also benefit patients by resulting in stronger symptom control and palliative care training. For patients for whom active treatment alone does not address their needs, the hospice care initiatives contained in the bill will add to their comfort and quality of life.

Chronic pain is a public health issue that impacts millions of Americans through some form of persisting or recurring symptom. During the final days of life, approximately 40 to 50 percent of patients experience significant pain due to their illness. Despite the best efforts of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, hospice providers and other health care professionals, pain is frequently insufficiently treated. It is the experience of PAF in seeking to meet the needs of patients with chronic pain, that in the absence of effective chronic pain management, patients may experience immediate symptoms of depression, loss of appetite, increased levels of anxiety, and loss of will to fight the disease. Coordination of federal efforts to improve pain management and palliative care is needed to ensure that patients receive quality pain and symptom management care. PAF has also found that reimbursement for pain management, including pain management prescriptions, is often insufficient for patients dealing with advanced disease and advanced stages of pain. The National Patient Advocate Foundation encourages the expansion of pain management research; strengthening the quality of pain management services; educating the public regarding pain management and palliative care; and educating health care professionals regarding pain management.

Thank you for your efforts to address these important patient concerns. The National Patient Advocate Foundation is pleased to add its name to the ever-growing list of patient and provider organizations that have voiced support for the Comprehensive Cancer Care Improvement Act of 2008, and we look forward to working with you to ensure passage of this vital legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy R. Goss".

President & CEO

National Patient Advocate Foundation