



For Immediate Release

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Friday, June 30, 2006

***ENZI, COCHRAN, TALENT, DEWINE, INOUYE CALL ON CMS TO
CONDUCT BALANCED INVESTIGATION INTO MEDICARE
PAYMENTS TO PHARMACISTS***

Washington, D.C. – In a letter today to Dr. Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Senator Jim Talent (R-MO), Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH), and Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) called on CMS to expand its survey of Medicare’s performance reimbursing pharmacies under Part D, to include data and comments from pharmacists in addition to data collected from drug plans.

The letter came in response to a CMS report on pharmacy payment cycles published on June 21, 2006. In the letter, Enzi, Cochran, Talent, DeWine, and Inouye said they are “deeply concerned that the results as presented are misleading,” because the report is based solely on data sampling from Medicare prescription drug plans.

“Pharmacists were not surveyed, and, therefore, their experiences with Medicare are not represented in the results,” the Senators wrote. “This ‘snapshot’ approach which excludes the pharmacy perspective does not present a balanced account of the circumstances surrounding payment.”

The survey also focused only on the plans’ contract requirements for payment, not actual payment data. It therefore contains no information about when pharmacists are actually being reimbursed for Medicare claims.

“Pharmacists want to continue to provide quality care for seniors, but many are struggling to remain financially viable due to cash flow problems caused by slow reimbursement from the Medicare prescription drug plans,” the Senators said. “Our pharmacists continue to serve Medicare patients despite late payments and cash flow concerns. They deserve a fair and accurate examination of pharmacy payment by the Medicare plans.”

Senator Enzi, Senator Cochran, and Senator Talent introduced a bill in April, the “Pharmacist Access and Recognition in Medicare Act,” S. 2563, to help support community pharmacists adjusting to the new Medicare Part D Drug benefit by ensuring they are reimbursed as quickly as possible and by guaranteeing beneficiaries have access to local pharmacists.

“Pharmacists are on the front lines of a revolutionary change in Medicare that is bringing long-overdue prescription drug benefits to our seniors,” Enzi said. “I strongly support community pharmacists and realize that they face challenges as they help implement the most significant improvement to Medicare since its inception in 1965.

“Our bill will protect the valuable role that pharmacists play in the communities all across the country and will help them adjust to many of the market changes being created by Medicare’s new drug benefits.”

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